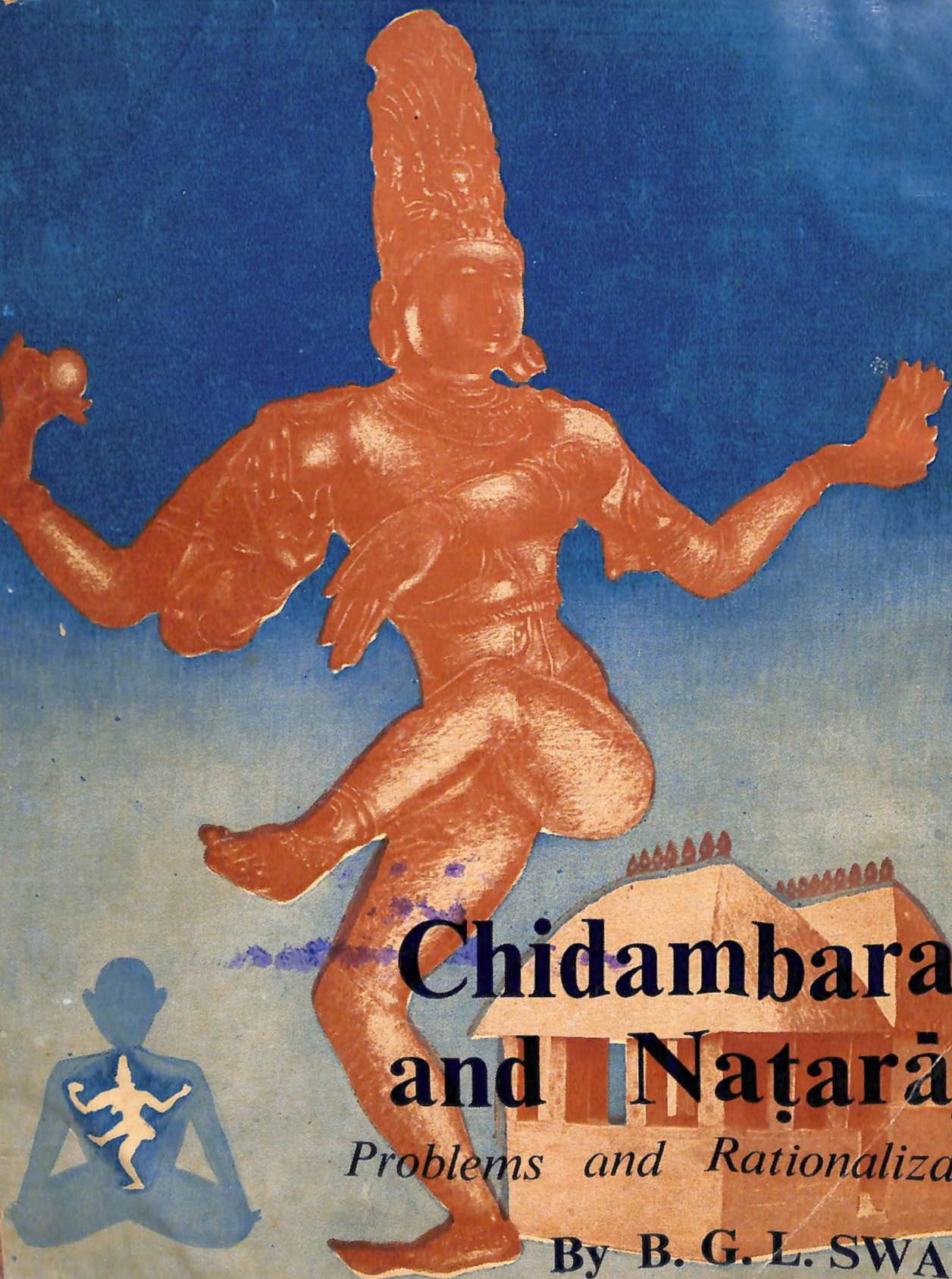


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Chidambaram and Natarāja

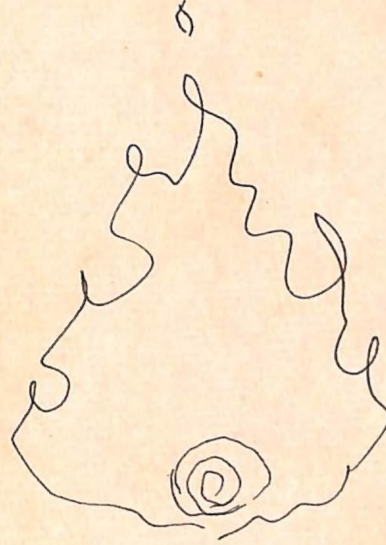
Problems and Rationalization

By B. G. L. SWAMY

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தஞ்சாவூர் நடராஜபிள்ளை உலகநாதன்.



அன்பளிப்பு:
தஞ்சாவூர்
நடராஜபிள்ளை உலகநாதன் M.A.B.T

T.N. Olaganathan, M.A., B.T.,

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He developed interest in History while collecting materials for an understanding of the relation of plants to Man in South India. This opened up a sideline curiosity in reference to a study of the Schools of Śaivism in South India and he published several paper on "The Source Materials for a History of Plant Sciences in India" and on "Medieval Śaivism in Tamil Nadu".

Dr. Swamy has also been a Kannada writer of renown over the past two decades, and the style and content of his writings are characterised by powerful wit, satire and light humour apart from the sharpness and sweep of his narrative. His published works in Kannada language have a revealing width of interests and they include reminiscences, travelogue, history of plant science, plants and trees in epigraphs, reflective essays, and lores and legends of plants, trees, flowers and shrubs, besides botany for the layman.

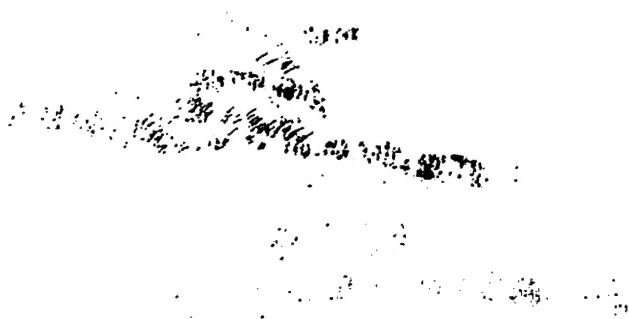
Dr. Swamy is the recipient of the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award (1977) for his work *Hasuru Honnu* ('Green Wealth'), an illustrated travelogue in Kannada giving descriptions and uses of over 100 rare and familiar plants.

Though retired from active teaching service, Dr. Swamy continues to preoccupy himself with several research projects and he is closely associated with botanical research in a number of learned institutions in India and abroad.

THE *ānanda tāṇḍava* DANCE OF ŚIVA is a unique concept of the *Pratyabhijnādarśana*, a School of Śaivism which developed in Kashmir in the 9th century A.D. A group of followers of this cult migrated to Tamil Nadu during the first half of the 10th century and through royal patronage of the then ruling Colas established themselves at Chidambaram, South Arcot District, Tamil Nadu.

The Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram has been the subject of prolific writing. Unfortunately, as there has been an undercurrent of reverential feeling, the writing mostly are a medley of history and legend, permeated by sentimental and emotional observations. Consequently, the result is a truncated account devoid of such aspects as the salient features of the cult of Naṭarāja embodying the concept of *ānanda tāṇḍava* in proper perspective and chronology.

Freeing himself from pious feeling an object of reverence engenders, Dr. B. G. L. Swamy has given in this illuminating work a fascinating account of the history of the institution involving mutual interactions with the indigenous brands of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism which form the subject-matter of the book.



Chidambaram and Natarāja

அன்பளிப்பு :
 தஞ்சாவூர்
 நடராஜபிள்ளை உருத்தாதன் M.A.B.T

CHIDAMBARAM

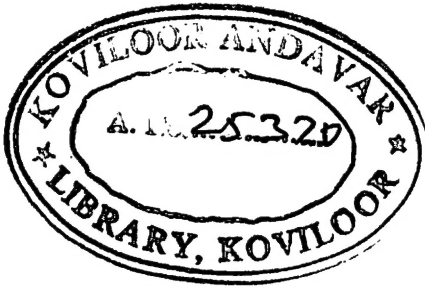
AND

NATARAJA

Problems and Rationalization

B. G. L. SWAMY

Tanjore Nataraja Pillai Gaganathan.,
M.A., B.T.,
6. 9. 1984..



அன்பளிப்பு :
தஞ்சாவூர்
நடராஜபிள்ளை உலகநாதன் M.A.B.T

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PREFACE

THE NĀṬARĀJA TEMPLE at Chidambaram, South Arcot District, Tamil Nadu, has been the subject of prolific writing. Unfortunately, as there has been an undercurrent of reverential feeling, the writings mostly are a medley of history and legend, permeated by sentimental and emotional observations. Consequently, the result is a truncated account devoid of such aspects as the salient features of the cult of Nāṭarāja embodying the concept of *ānanda tāṇḍava* in proper perspective and chronology. The delineation of these perhaps requires freedom from pious feelings an object of reverence engenders. In considering the subject for a thesis I have had this freedom uppermost in my mind.

I am deeply indebted to Mr. M. Sathyanarayana Rao for his personal interest and expertise in seeing through the proofs and press work.

B. G. L. Swamy

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PROLOGUE

த.ந. கணநாதன்

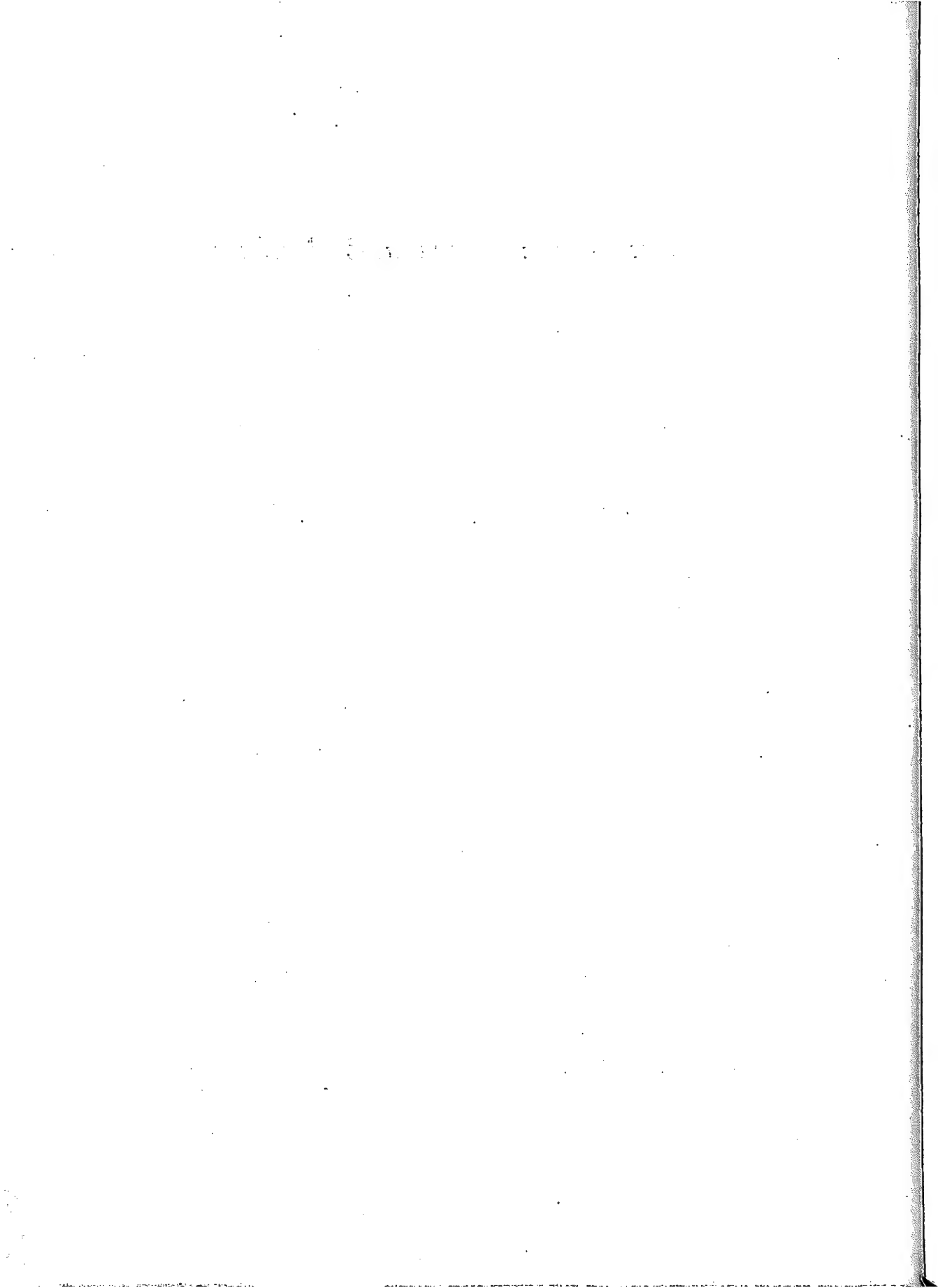
THE NATARĀJA TEMPLE at Chidambaram, South Arcot district, Tamil Nāḍu, is unique in several respects. This is the only one amongst all the old temples which lies outside the control of the Hindu Religious Endowment Board of the Government and its affairs are managed by the priests themselves who claim absolute ownership of the institution. This is the only Śiva temple which lacks a consecrated *linga* and where an anthropomorphic icon of Natarāja enjoys the full status of the chief deity receiving public worship. The regular and systematic rituals conducted for a non-consecrated *linga* (Candramaulīśvara) on the lines of personal (domestic) worship constitutes yet another feature that has been exclusive to this temple.

This was the first temple to possess a gilded roof, architecturally analogous to, but wholly unlike, the *vimānas* of contemporary institutions. Timber, a perishable material, with which the sanctum sanctorum, that is the *cit-sabhā*, has been constructed adds one more point of uniqueness. The absence of a *vimāna* of the conventional type and the constructional plan of the sanctum sanctorum stand as exceptions to the norm.

During my first visit to the temple in 1958, I stood at the point of intersection of the north-south axis of the *cit-sabhā* and the east-west axis of the Gōvindarāja shrine to obtain the *darsan* of the Dancing Lord. I felt an illusion that the position of the wall adjoining the back of this icon appeared to lie much nearer to the viewer than it should really be in relation to the external measurements of the *cit-sabhā*. In other words, this wall appeared to be a partition completely confronting the true northern boundary wall of the *cit-sabhā*, the two walls being separated by a distance of about 4 or 5 feet. On subsequent visits, more critical observations convinced me that my first impression was not the result of a mere apparition, but was indeed the actual situation. This set me on to the problem: What could be the reason for the presence of a concealed chamber in the *cit-sabhā* behind the Natarāja icon?

Response to my inquiries made with the local priests and knowledgeable persons showed a degree of reluctance on their part to discuss the problem; the only answer that I got was that the space, together with the 'rahasya' panel represented the *ākāśa* (ether) *linga*. An intensive study of available source materials in literature and epigraphy concerning the Naṭarāja institution was undertaken, and the results are recorded in the pages that follow.

Part One : Place and People



தமிழ்
சுவாமிநாதர்
தமிழ்ச் சிற்பம்
தமிழ்நாட்டின் உலக நாதர்.

CHAPTER I

PERUMBARRAPPULIYŪR AND CHIDAMBARAM

PERUMBARRAPPULIYŪR (PuliyŪr of the Tamil hymnists, for short) enjoyed the status of a *taniyŪr* during the 11th to 14th centuries. The earliest inscription in the Naṭarāja temple which refers to PerumbarrappuliyŪr as a *taniyŪr* is a record of Rājendra I (118 of 1888, A.D. 1036). A *taniyŪr* in the Cōla administrative context implies an independent or free village (Subramanian, 1957). It was a “larger self-governing local unit” (Balasubrahmanyam, 1943). Mahalingam (1967) thinks that “Probably it was a separate unit for administrative purposes, possibly enjoying a status equal to that of any large subdivision in the Empire”. There is some evidence to presume that the administrative control of PerumbarrappuliyŪr rested with a committee called *mūla parusai* (=mūla pariṣad). This body was in charge of buying and disposing of lands on behalf of the temple (4 of 1935/6, A.D. 1185), allotting land for specific purposes after obtaining the royal sanction (9 of 1935/6, A.D. 1219; 288 of 1913, A.D. c. 1290), abolishing taxes on lands (315 of 1958/9, A.D. 1269; 304 of 1959/9) and settlement of disputes (307 of 1958/9, A.D. 1257).

PerumbarrappuliyŪr in the medieval period “connoted an area much wider in extent than the present limits of the municipality” (Balasubrahmanyam, 1943). During the regnal years of Rājendra I and Kulōttunga I (A.D. 1012-1150) it comprised of 14 hamlets as listed by the Government Epigraphist (*ARE*, 1914, para 13). These are listed in the following table (Nos. 1-14, first column); many of these are heard of in the subsequent periods as well (epigraphic references in the second column) and also new hamlets became incorporated (Nos. 15-20).

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Pannangudiccēri (Parakēsarinalūr) | 261 of 1913, A.D. 1254 |
| 2. Iḷanagūr
(sundara cōḷa pāṇḍyanallūr) | 261 of 1913, A.D. 1254 |
| 3. Karikkuḍi | 344 of 1913, A.D. 1503 |
| 4. Maṇalūr | 260 of 1913, A.D. 1184 |

5. Kōyilpūṇḍi
(Kṣatriyasikhāmaṇinallūr) 273 of 1913, A.D. 1210
316 of 1913, A.D. 1226
327 of 1913, A.D. 1253
6. Śivapuri (Modern village of the same name)
7. Kōlam (Cōlakēraḷadēvanallūr) 275 of 1913, A.D. c. 1264
8. Akkan-pallippadai
(Vikramacōḷanallūr) 327 of 1913, A.D. 1253
275 of 1913, A.D. c. 1264
276 of 1913, A.D. c. 1289
9. Tiruvēṭkaḷam (Modern village of the same name)
10. Kaduvaicceri
(Tillaināyakanallūr) 7 of 1935/6, A.D. 1189
311 of 1958/9, A.D. 13th century
563 of 1958/9, A.D. 13th century
11. Chandēśvaranallūr
12. Korrangudi
(Pavitrāmāṇikkanallūr) 318 of 1913, A.D. 1252
279 of 1913, A.D. 1338
13. Midinikkuḍi
14. Erukkattānceri
(Jayakondācōḷanallūr) 13 of 1935/6, A.D. 1226
106 of 1934/5, A.D. 1254
6 of 1935/6, A.D. 1263
276 of 1913, A.D. c. 1289
5 of 1935/6, A.D. 1346
15. Sundarapāṇḍyacaturvēdimangalam 306 of 1958/9, A.D. c. 1258
16. Cōlakulavallinallūr 173 of 1892, A.D. 1096
320 of 1913, A.D. 1343
17. Parakēśarinallūr 309 of 1913, A.D. 1190
18. Vikramapāṇḍya
chaturvēdimangalam 277 of 1913, A.D. c. 1264
19. Bhuvanamāḷudaiya-
chaturvēdimangalam 309 of 1958/9
20. Ulagamūḍaiya chatur-
vēdimangalam 278 of 1913, A.D. 1123

The above data indicate that even as early as the beginning of the 11th century, Puliyūr had attained the status of an independent administrative unit incorporating a number of surrounding villages and that the importance of the place continued to increase in the

following centuries of Cōla and Pāṇḍya rule as evidenced by the new hamlets that were added on. A perusal of the alternative names (indicated within brackets in the table) and those of the items 15-20 are suggestive of their new founding by the ruling kings and confirm that they were to serve as *dēva-dāna* villages or as settlements for Brāhmaṇa families who were learned in Vēdic lore. A 13th century epigraph of Sundarapāṇḍya I specifically refers to the founding of Vikramapāṇḍyacaturvēdimangalam in the western part of Perumbarrappuliyūr and of its presentation to 108 learned Brāhmaṇas (277 of 1913). Vikrama Cōla had similarly gifted Āḍūr *alias* Jananāthanallūr to 108 Brāhmaṇas (278 of 1913, A.D. 1123). The tradition of instituting new villages for the settlement of Vēdic Brāhmaṇas must have been in vogue in the Tamil country from the time of the Pallavas (Subramanya Aiyer, 1938/40). And the growth of Perumbarrappuliyūr in expanse and density of population appears to be largely because of the continuation of the old tradition of establishing new settlements by the medieval rulers. The *tēvāram* singers frequently refer to the sound of Vēdic chanting and to the smell of fires kindled for Vēdic rituals in Perumbarrappuliyūr, which is an indirect testimony to the rather dense concentration of Vēdic Brāhmaṇas at the place.

The epigraphs of the medieval period speak of Cīrāmbaram (Cīrāmbalam) as being situated in Perumbarrappuliyūr. There is no warrant to understand the former name as representing a hamlet or village that was included in Perumbarrappuliyūr or as an area in it. On the contrary, it refers to a specific building at the place. The *tēvārams* of Appar (VI, 2) and Sundarar (VII, 90) use the term Puliyūrccīrāmbalam, which should obviously mean 'the Cīrāmbaram which is situated in Puliyūr'; 'Tiruchchīrāmbalamuḍaiyār', another term employed by them and also in epigraphy, clearly refers to the 'Lord of Cīrāmbaram'. Therefore, both in early literature and epigraphy there is no confusion whatsoever in reference to the scope of the two terms involved; Perumbarrappuliyūr was the town and Cīrāmbaram, a specific building located in it.

During the time of the Vijayanagara ruler, Krishnadēvarāya, the administrative set-up of Perumbarrappuliyūr appears to have undergone modification. This place was now included "in Araśūr-Kīlparū, a subdivision of Venṇiyūr-nāḍu, in Rajādhirāja-vaṇanāḍu

which was a district included in the province of Bhuvanaika-vīraṇpaṭṭina-śīrmai (325 of 1913, A.D. 1510). Yet the designation of Cīrāmbaram as pointedly referring to the building (by the alternative name *Ponnambalam*) continued to be in vogue (174 of 1892). The term Chidambaram, referring to the township of Perumbarrappuliyūr, is, therefore, clearly of a much later origin.

Gopinatha Rao (1914) is probably the first to suggest the etymology of the word Cīrāmbalam as consisting of two Tamil components; *cīru* (small) and *Ambalam* (temple). This derivation has been accepted at large either with the same etymology (Harle, 1963), or with a slightly modified slant, —*cīrumai*+*ambalam* (VI *Tirumurai*, *padikam* No. 22, footnote commentary; Dharmapuram Ādhīnam edition).

There are, however, opinions favouring the derivation of the term from Samskr̥t base: *cit* (consciousness)+*ambaram/ambalam* (space, cosmos, *ākāśa*) (Balasubrahmanyam, 1943; Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946). It may be noted, all the same, that some of the Śaiva hagiologists also accept this meaning as a derived one. In usage, the term *cit-sabhā* is synonymous with *cit-ambaram*, although *sabhā* refers to a hall in common parlance. Avvai Doraswami Pillai (1958) has re-asserted the Tamil derivation in the following words: "In those days (in the time of Tirunāvukkarasar) Tillai was not known as Cidambaram; it is only in later times that *cīrāmbalam* got modified as Cidambaram. Those Samskr̥tists who did not know this history, split the word as *cit*+*ambaram* and superimposed concepts like *cidākāśa*."

It should be observed that opinions following this trend are based on wrong premiss. Granting for a moment that the original name was of Tamil origin, it is difficult to understand how the first part of the word *cīru* or *cīrumai* (small) can be translated into Samskr̥t as *cit* which under no circumstance connotes smallness. *Ambara* in Samskr̥t generally means cloth or sky (infinite space)—the latter sense in the present context—and nowhere does it imply the meaning of a hall or court or temple. The displacement of *ra* by *la* (*ambala*)—a natural phonetic phenomenon—carries with it some derived meanings: court, hall, etc. The substitution of *la* and the consequential acquisition of the changed contexts must have happened during early times, and Doraswami Pillai's charge may have some

justification in reference to words such as *sabhānāyaka*, *sabhēśa*, etc. (the Lord of the Court or Hall). But *ambala* in this form and context has never found currency in old Samskr̥t language anywhere else. Frankly speaking, it is the change-over from *ambaram* to *ambalam* that imported the meanings court/hall/temple, etc.; these are clearly indigenous superimpositions lacking an historical basis. Similarly, adduction of the analogy from the usage in Kerala country, where the term *ambalam* is used for a temple, is again untenable because of the lack of direct contact between the religious cults in the two regions.

In this connection two of the many expressions used by the First Three *samayācāryas* are worth noting:

“tillai ambalattul niraṇḍāum kūttan” (the dancer who *fills* the space [ākāśa] in the Tillai through his dance) (VII.62.4).

“ambalattul niraṇḍu ninrāḍum oruvanē” (the One who stands filling the space of the *ambaram* (ākāśa) and dances (114.8).

The same import is expressed in a more direct manner by one of the recent mystic poets, Rāmalingasvāmi:

Ambarattilāḍukinrār.....
 antarattilāḍukinrār.....
 aṇḍabahirandamellām..... aiyar āṭṭamenru.....

In these quotations the import is the cosmic, all-pervading nature of the dance of Śiva. If the first part of the word in *Cirrambaram* is interpreted as indicative of the *physical smallness* of the Tillai or *ambalam* instead of understanding it as the Samskr̥t word *cit*, the fundamental significance of the concept and cult of the Ānanda-tāṇḍava is totally lost.

CHAPTER II

TILLAI AND THE THREE THOUSAND

THE NAME TILLAI, which has been in use as an alternative for the modern Chidambaram, is believed to have been derived from the *tillai* (*Exoecaria agallocha*, Linn.) trees that grow in the region—thus the name *Tillaivanam* (forest of *Exoecaria agallocha*, Linn.) In Samskr̥t, the name is spelt in a modified form, *Tilvavanam*. It is a fact that *tillai* plants grow in and around Chidambaram, but they also thrive with greater luxuriance in the tidal forests and swamps along both the coasts of India. Yet this plant is not known by this name in areas of Tamil country other than Chidambaram.

The *Tillai* tree is believed to be the *sthalavṛkṣa* ('Temple-tree') of the Naṭarāja temple. The association of plants with the Śiva temples and naming the *linga* therein after the name of that particular plant is a tradition that is met with frequently only in the Tamil country. As has been shown elsewhere (Swamy, 1977), this is a relatively modern tradition initiated by the composers of *sthalapurāṇas* (narratives of the traditions and legends of temples); the custom was not in vogue prior to the 16/17/18th centuries. The *Kōyilpurāṇam*, presumed to have been written by Umāpati-śivācārya* (14th century A.D.), dealing with the legends of the Naṭarāja temple does not speak of a *sthalavṛkṣa* for the temple; nor do the other *māhātmyas* (glorificatory accounts) concerning the temple. The extension of the concept to the Naṭarāja temple must have happened at a more recent period when it was realized that the association of a tree with the temple would not only enhance the prestige but raise its status to the rank of other great temples. This appears to have been accomplished for the first time by the author of *Tilvavana-māhātmyam*. It is difficult to date this work, but it would not be wrong to assign the 18th century to it, going by its language and style.

* This opinion appears to be a belief rather than a proven fact. In fact, Sadasiva Pandarattar (1963) has not included this *purāṇam* as a work of Umāpati. My own view is that it was written by an anonymous person sometime in the 16/17th centuries.

One other point deserves comment in this connection. The *sthalavrkṣa* is always associated with temples that possess a consecrated *linga*. Neither the image of Naṭarāja nor the structure in which it is housed is consecrated according to Southern *āgamic* injunctions. Therefore the present shrine cannot be considered as a temple in all its implications. If the Tillai tree is the *sthalavrkṣa* of the Naṭarāja shrine, we are referring to the sole exception. If, on the other hand, the tree is deemed to be associated with the *mūlasthāna* shrine in the second *prākāra*, the epigraphic evidence is against such an understanding. Wherever the *linga* has taken its name after a 'forest' of a kind of species, the name *vana* is invariably incorporated into the name of the *linga*, e.g., *Amravanēśvara*, *Bilva-vananāthēśvara*, *Cūṭavanēśvara*, *Kadalīvananātha*, *Kāncanavananātha*, etc. This nomenclatural system is in no way different from the one generally followed in cases where there is no tree association to begin with. The names of the *linga* were chosen after the town or village in which they were consecrated excepting in cases of temples that were erected in honour of some king or dignitary. The epigraphical records prior to the 16th century afford numerous examples of the kind, e.g., Kālattīśvaramuḍaiyār (Kālahasti), Vaḍa-talai-uḍaiyār (Omampuliyūr), Oṟriyūruḍaiyār (Tiruvoṟriyūr), Pāśū-ruḍaiyār (Tirupāccūr), Karukāvūruḍaiyār (Karukāvūr), etc. In the case of epigraphs concerning the Naṭarāja temple, the most frequent form of the name is Tiruchchirrambalamuḍaiyār and never Tīlvavanamuḍaiyār or Tillaivanamuḍaiyār, thereby clearly indicating that the place was never called Tillaivanam in earlier times.

There are no grounds to presume the association of the *Tillai* tree, or any other plant (some *sthalapurāṇas* mention the banyan tree) for that matter, with the *mūlasthāna* shrine either. Whether in epigraphy or in literature, this shrine has always been referred to as the *mūlasthāna*, and the deity (*linga*) as *mūlasthānamuḍaiyār* (the Lord of the *mūlasthāna*).

However, the word *Tillai* has been in use as referring to the Naṭarāja temple—more pointedly to the *cit-sabhā*—in Tamil literature commencing from the First Three *tēvāram* singers. Tiru-gnānasambandar and Tirunāvukkarasar, as well as Sundarar, use the term as being synonymous with *cit-ambaram*. The commonly occurring term Tillaichchirrambalam only means 'Tillai which is

Cirrambalam' or 'Cirrambalam which is Tillai'. Tirunāvukkarasar's expression, "*tillaiyut cirrambalattunaṭṭam*" (81, 3, 9, 10) should be taken to mean 'the dance in the hall of *cit* which is within the Tillai'. *Tillai* is also often used singly to denote the same *cit-ambaram*.

Tirugnānasambandar employs the expression *Tirumān tillai* (I.80.6). The Dharmapuram Ādhīnam edition gives the meaning as "the big (great) *Tillai* associated with Tirumagaḷ (Lakshmi)", which is somewhat ponderous. *Tirumān* is nothing but the corrupted form of the Samskr̥t *Srīmān*, an honorific, and implies the same scope and context in Tamil as well.

Sundarar's line "*Tillainagarp poduvurraṭiya sīrnaṭamum*" (VII. 84. 5) conveys the 'grand dance performed in the hall (situated) in the city of *Tillai*'. The reference to *Tillai* as a city may not be a mere imagination of the poet. It is quite possible that the temple was surrounded by tenements during his time and the area appeared as somewhat similar to a small township. In any case, the extended usage should signify the importance that *Tillai* had attained. That this was so is further suggested by Tirunāvukkarasar's decade (IV. 8.1) where he describes the city as containing several buildings and gardens (e.g., 114.10; 247.3).

The composers of epigraphic texts scrupulously avoided the use of *Tillai* as referring to the Naṭarāja temple. They designated this structure only as Tiruchchirrambalam. It is not as if the script writers were unaware of the term *Tillai*, a term which was so familiar to the composers of Śaivite hymns during the 10th to 13th centuries. For one thing, the epigraph was a document (*śāsana*)—more often royal and official documents—and as such the words chosen to be used required precision, proper names and unambiguity. Perumbarrappuliyūr was the officially recognized name of the city while Cirrambalām figured as the authorized name of the temple in all epigraphs where land or endowment transactions are recorded. The choice of the name Cirrambalam by the document writers and of *Tillai* or *Tillaichchirrambalam* by the Śaiva hagiologists appears to indicate a situation which is rather peculiar. The latter group of authors also were aware of Perumbarrappuliyūr (= Puliyūr) as they refer to *Tillai cirrambalam* as having been situated in this town.

What could be the reason for the document writers to refrain themselves from employing the term *Tillai*? Could it be that the

term was of exotic origin and was, therefore, kept out of official records? It has been already pointed out that the derivation of this name after the *Tillai* tree is both untenable and anachronic. The term cannot be derived from Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam or Samskr̥t languages; nor a clue is found in the dialects of South India. The only area where a phonetically similar word appears to have had a much wider currency in the old days than today is the north of the Vindhyas, and the word is *tilla* or *tīla*.

The term *tilla* apparently belongs to an *apabhraṃśa* dialect of North India. It obviously denotes the residence of those practising *yōga*. The *yōga-sthānas* of the *Gōrakh-panthis* (followers of the *Gōrakhnāth* school of *yōga*) were (and are) invariably known by this term (Briggs, 1936). In later parlance the term acquired the meaning of a building or structure erected on a raised platform of foundation or an elevated place itself; the general occurrence or *tillas* on elevated loci like hills or mountains, remote from human habitation, also could have contributed to its derived meaning. Many of the old *tillas* were built in a way enclosing a natural cave where the *yōgis* practised their discipline; or, when new'y constructed, provision was made to set apart a chamber for the same purpose, which was not exposed to the public view. The structure of the same name at *Perumbarappuliyūr*, as may be seen, falls within this scope.

References to the 'Three-thousand' of Tillai occur frequently in Tamil literature of the medieval period. All modern authors equate these 'Three-thousand' with the present day priests (*dīkṣitars*) of Chidambaram, who are the custodians and owners of the Naṭarāja temple. The *dīkṣitars* also, in their turn, claim their ancestry to the 'Three-thousand.'

The hymns of the Nāyanmārs speak of *Tillai andaṇar* (Tirugnānasambandar: andaṇar piriyāda ciṛṛambalam; Tirunāvukkarasar: andaṇartam cintaiyānai; ulakukkellām tiruvudai andaṇar (vālkinṇa tillai), etc. Similar references may be found in the other Books of the *Tirumurai* series.

Although the term *andaṇar* is taken to mean *brāhmaṇas* in general in modern parlance, it is doubtful if this meaning holds well in all contexts, particularly in the medieval period. As will be shown later, the *Tillaites* were followers of the *Pratyabhignā* doctrine (otherwise called 'Kashmir Śaivism') and the roots of this system are

found in the *āgamas* and never in the *Vēdas* and *Upaniṣads*. Their ritualistic modes were therefore based essentially on non-*vēdic* doctrinal texts, although in recent times the employment of *Vēdic mantras* as a part of public worship have become part of the litany in the Naṭarāja temple, Chidambaram (Chapter X). Naralōkavīra's inscription (Appendix A) appears to confirm their non-*vēdic* following in the 11th century. Therefore, with particular reference to the *Tillaites*, the term *andaṇar* is best understood in the light of the definition provided in the Muppāl: "andaṇar enbōr aravōr," which means those who possess the quality of *dharma*, which is believed to be the outcome of disciplined living and learning—and the term is applicable to *tapasvins* and learned men who follow the path of virtue irrespective of caste. It is obvious that there is no warrant to associate such persons with any particular religion or community. The *Tillai andaṇars* were known for their *yōgic* practices and great learning (cf. references to Bhaṭṭācārya in Naralōkavīra's inscription, Appendix A), and their being referred to by this name is quite befitting.

They have also been designated as *maṛaiyōrs* (Tirugnāna-sambandar). This term has been understood again as referring to the *brāhmaṇas* as the first part of the word *maṛai* is presumed to mean *Vēdas*. Whether it should be taken in this strict sense in all contexts is doubtful. *Maṛai* only means scripture; not only the *brāhmaṇas*, but the followers of non-*vēdic* religions also have their own scriptural literature. Therefore the term has to be taken in its wider-sense. With reference to the *Tillaites*, the *maṛai* was the *āgamic* lore.

In spite of Doraswami Pillai's (1958) assertion that there is no mention that the *Tillaites* belonged to the 'Three-thousand' group in the *tirumuṛai* of Tirugnānasambandar and of the two others of the First Three *samayācāryas*, it should be pointed out that Sundarar does refer to the *Tillaites* as the "Three-thousand": *muṭṭāda muccandi mūvāyiravar* (VII. 90. 7). Therefore, the identity of the 'Three-thousand' with the *Tillai andaṇars* appears to have been in vogue during the period of the Śaivite hymnists.

The Vaiṣṇavite hymnists, Tirumangai and Kulaśēkhara, also speak of the *mūvāyiravars* as adoring the reclining Viṣṇu at a temple somewhere in the town of Tillai (Chapter V). Tirumumangai specifi-

cally refers to them as “mūvāyira nān maraiyālar”, which has been generally construed as “the Three-thousand who followed the four Vēdas.” It is also believed that these ‘Three-thousand’ are identical with the Tillaites. By taking these Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite references together as belonging to one homogeneous category, generalizations are often made that the sectarian feelings had not become bifurcated into fanatical groups in that early period. As a consequence, it is said that “The worship of the two deities, Naṭarāja and Gōvindarāja, was in the hands of the 3000 of Tillai” (Balasubrahmanyam, 1942). In addition to voicing the same opinion, Aruvamuthan (1962/5) goes on to adduce esoteric explanations for the placement of the shrines of these two deities in such close proximity as is found today.

Such statements are misleading. As will be shown in Chapter V, there is no evidence to presume the existence of the two shrines *in situ* in periods prior to the 16th century. Therefore the question of a common set of priests for the two shrines at any period of history does not arise.

It should be emphasized here that the translations of the terms *andaṇar*, *maraiyōr* and *mūvāyiravar*, respectively, as *brāhmaṇas*, *Vēdic* followers (again meaning *brāhmaṇas*), and ‘Three-thousand’ were proposed at a time when the full implications—both positive and negative—of sifting historical data from literature had not been clearly understood. Uncritical acceptance of such translated terms by later authors has led to confused thinking and unwarranted conclusions. If the suggestions put forward above—to understand *andaṇar* as learned and disciplined men (*dharmiṣṭha*) filled with pity/penance/wisdom, and *maraiyōr* as those who follow scriptures (of their respective faith)—are acceptable, the association of the *andaṇar* and *maraiyōr* with Naṭarāja and Gōvindarāja shrines becomes resolved. Thus, the Tillaites were a group of persons who were the followers of *āgamic* scriptures. A clue to the identity of the *andaṇar* of the Gōvindarāja shrine is seen in the lines of Tirumangai (quoted in Chapter V)—*nān marai*, according to which they should be considered as the followers of the *Vēdic* religion.

The term ‘mūvāyiravar’ also needs to be viewed in a light different from the traditional numerical context. The term is made up of two parts, *mū+āyiravar*, and has been arbitrarily translated as ‘Three-thousand’. The first part of the word means also ‘ancient’,

and derivatively 'elders', in the honorific sense. The second part, *āyiravar*, in the non-arithmetical sense, merely means 'numerous' or 'a group of elders', which merely indicates that a group of elders with *āgamic* following was associated with the Naṭarāja shrine, while another group of elders with *Vēdic* following was associated with the Viṣṇu shrine.

* * * * *

The printed Samskr̥t texts refer to the priests of the Naṭarāja shrine as "*trisahasra*", "*traisahasra*", etc. (Kunchitānghristavam), which convey the traditional literal rendering of 'mūvāyiravar'. In a couple of palmleaf manuscripts written in *grantha* alphabets and dealing with ritualistic aspects, I have noticed a variant form of this term as "*triksahasra*". Could the forms in the printed editions be corruption or abbreviation of the latter term? If it is so, there is a clue to a more definite identity of the Tillaites. *Trika* is an alternative name for the *Pratyabhignā* system of philosophy. This term is used in the sense of 'triad' because of the three types of texts that form the authoritative source materials, *āgama sāstra*, *spanda sāstra* and *Pratyabhignā sāstra* (Chatterji, 1914); it is also so called "either because it accepts as most important the triad, *siddha*, *namaka* and *mālinī*, out of the 92 *āgamas* recognized by it; or because the triad consisting of Śiva-Śakti-Aṇu, or again, of Śiva-Śakti-Nara, or lastly, of the goddesses Parā, Aparā and Parāparā; or because it explains the three modes of knowledge of Reality, viz., *abhēda*, *bhēdābhēda* and *bhēda*." (Bamzi, 1962). Would it not be in the fitness of things to connect the 'triksahasra' as a group of followers of the *trika* system?

* * * * *

That the Tillaites were immigrants into the Tamil country is implied in certain attractive legends. One of these was narrated to me by a senior *dīkṣitar* of the temple and I have not been able to locate its source in published literature. The legend runs on the following lines:

The ancestors of the present-day *dīkṣitars* came down to Chidambaram a long time ago from the North in order to perform a sacrifice. Overjoyed with the devotion with which it was conducted, Lord Śiva appeared before them and performed the *ānanda-tāṇḍava*

(Dance of Bliss). He asked them what they desired. They requested Him to stay with them for ever, which he did.

The origin of another legend can be traced to the *sthalapurāṇas*. From these sources we gather that:

Once Brahma invited the 'Three-thousand' of Tillai to perform a sacrifice at Benares. After the conduct was over, they were commanded to return to Chidambaram by Hiranyavarman. On their return they discovered that one of them was missing and therefore instituted a search. A voice from the skies declared that the missing person was no other than the *sabhā-nāyaka*, that is, Lord Naṭarāja Himself.

These legends, when taken together, indicate that (i) the present-day *dīkṣitars* belong to the lineage of 'the group of leaders' who are also called 'the learned and wise men of Tillai', (ii) their ancestors had settled down at Chidambaram after having migrated from somewhere, and (iii) Lord Naṭarāja was one of them. It is obviously such legends that have added colour to the understanding of 'mūvā-yiravar' as representing the constituent number of their group.

The second legend also vaguely suggests the nature of their doctrinal content—the relationship of the 'wise/learned men' with Śiva. That one of them had become Śiva Himself appears to indicate a kind of non-dualistic existence of the Universe, a concept upheld by the *Pratyabhignā darśana* ('Kashmir Śaivism').

The present-day priests of the Naṭarāja temple call themselves *dīkṣitars*. Although they are referred to as the 'Three-thousand', or as *tillai-vāl-andaṇars* ('the virtuous of Tillai') in literature, it is rather surprising that they have never been designated as *dīkṣitars* anywhere. However, as already noted, all modern authors freely equate the *dīkṣitars* with the 'Three-thousand'. It is obvious that a *dīkṣita* is a person who has undergone some kind of a formal initiation (*dīkṣa*). In fact, the *pūjaka* of the Naṭarāja temple is "entitled to perform 'pūjas' and 'archanas' only after he is initiated in the 'pūja'" (Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946). There appears to be also other types of *dīkṣa*—*sāmaya*, *viśēṣa*, *nirvāṇa* and *ācārya*—prescribed for them. They are said to become authorized to perform the *pūjas* in the main shrines of the Naṭarāja temple complex only after they are initiated into *vaidika-dīkṣa* (Ramalingam, 1963). Although a *dīkṣa*

of some kind or other has entered into the orgy of many a religious cult for some purpose or the other, with varying shades of importance and significance, the *dīkṣa* in the *Trika* system possess a very great significance of a special kind. It alone "gives the knowledge of Atman and, because it destroys the fetters of bondage", the *dīkṣa* "is initiation in beatitude, which gives identity with Siva or manifestation of his nature" (Sinha, 1970). Would this situation again possibly mean the intimacy of *Trika* system with the *dīkṣitars* of the Naṭarāja temple?

Part Two: Architecture

CHAPTER III

CIT-SABHĀ AND KANAKA-SABHĀ

IT IS UNFORTUNATE that no maps or survey plans of the Naṭarāja temple complex at Chidambaram are available. The non-availability of even a rough groundplan of the *cit-sabhā* sub-complex is a positive lacuna for students of architecture and more so for a researcher. The rather crude diagrams reproduced by Naidu *et al* (1936) and Somasundaram (1963) are thoroughly inadequate for any critical study. An accurately executed plan of the *cit-sabhā* and its confronting *kanaka-sabhā* is necessary for a critical appraisal of the problem. In the absence of facilities and wherewithal for the preparation of such a plan, I have attempted to draw up a diagram of the sanctum sanctorum of Naṭarāja based on my own foot measurements. I am fully aware that this is certainly not the appropriate preamble for a scientific study, but I do testify to the maintenance of accuracy in terms of relative proportions of the measurements.

There has been some confusion in regard to the application and identity of the terms *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā* (*ponnambalam*). In epigraphy and in literature these two terms have been used both in restricted and expanded senses. The enclosure containing the icons of Naṭarāja and Śivakāmi as well as the 'rahasya' panel is the *cit-sabhā* in the strict sense; the hall in front of this enclosure is the *kanaka-sabhā* again in the strict sense, wherein the daily *pūjas* and rituals are conducted. However, there have been numerous instances where the term *kanaka-sabhā* has been used in a wider sense so as to include both the *sabhās*. The confusion is, in part, due to the possession of gold-covered roofs by both the *sabhās* from a long time. In the present study the two halls are deemed to represent separate units, the northern (*cit-sabhā*) and the southern (*kanaka-sabhā*), both constituting a sub-complex.

The *cit-sabhā* is a rectangular enclosure with a floor area of two adjacently placed squares (FIG. 1). It is surrounded by a corri-

dor between two rows of black granite pillars on three sides: northern, eastern and western. The southern side is practically open and is bordered by wooden trellice screen on either side of the medianly built five steps (*pañcākṣara* steps) leading into the *cit-*

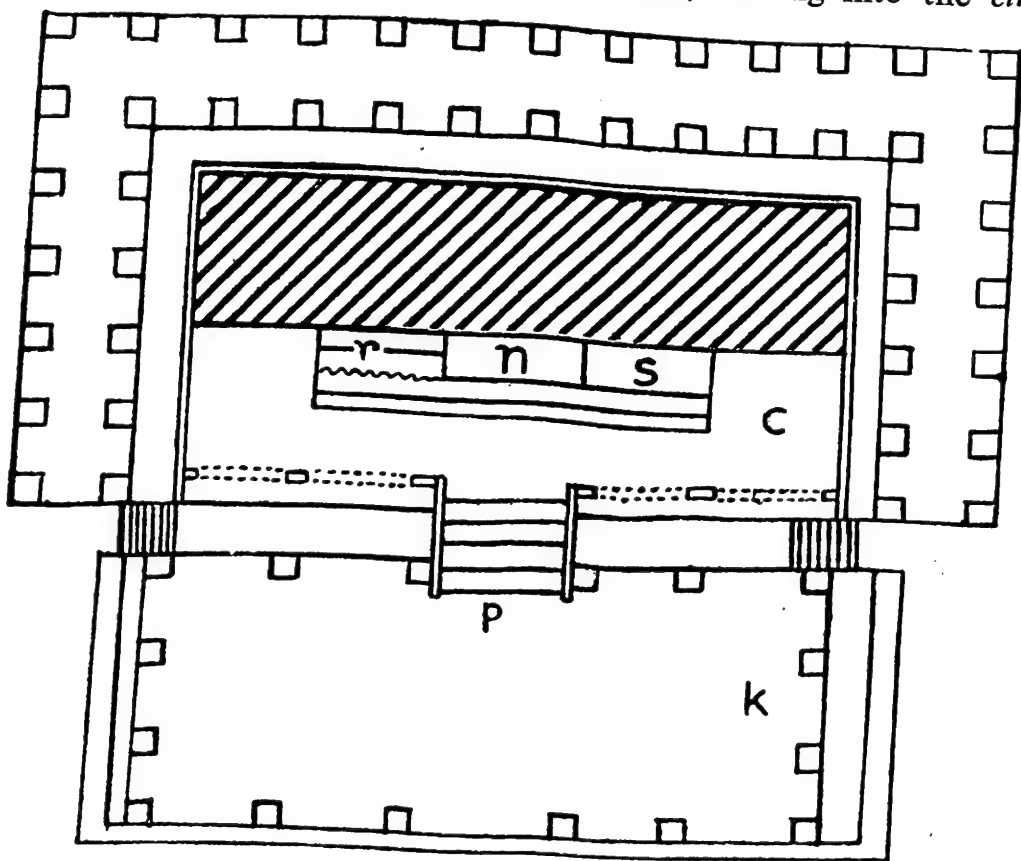


FIG. 1. Plan of *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā* sub-complex: *c* - *cit-sabhā*; *k* - *kanaka-sabhā*; *p* - *pañcākṣara* steps; *n* - Naṭarāja; *r* - 'rahasya' panel; *s* - Śivakāmi; cross-hatched area - concealed chamber.

sabhā. This *sabhā* is at a higher elevation (3 to 4 feet) than the confronting *kanaka-sabhā* (FIG. 2).

The *cit-sabhā* (*c*, Fig. 1) is partitioned by a horizontal wall running east-west thereby separating the area/volume into two equal halves. The southern enclosure now contains the icon of Naṭarāja (*n*) in the centre against the wall, flanked on the eastern side by the icon of Śivakāmi (*s*) and on the western by the 'rahasya' (*r*) panel.

These three entities are located on a raised platform with two steps on which the *pādukās*, Chandramaulīṣvara, Ratnasabhāpati, etc., are kept. In cross-sectional area the platform runs parallel to and against the partition wall and occupies nearly three-fifths of the length in the centre, leaving symmetrically one-fifth of the length on either side; the narrower dimension of the platform is equivalent to half of the length from the partition wall to the *pañcākṣara*(*p*) steps. Thus the distance from the uppermost *pañcākṣara* step to the image of Natarāja is so short that the worshipping priest standing on this step can reach the icon by stretching his arm. Therefore the narrower length of this southern part of the *cit-sabhā* cannot be more than four feet. The partition wall rises up until it intersects the median line of the gabled roof (FIG. 2).

The total area/volume of the *cit-sabhā* is thus made up of two distinct chambers of equal dimensions, the southern containing the

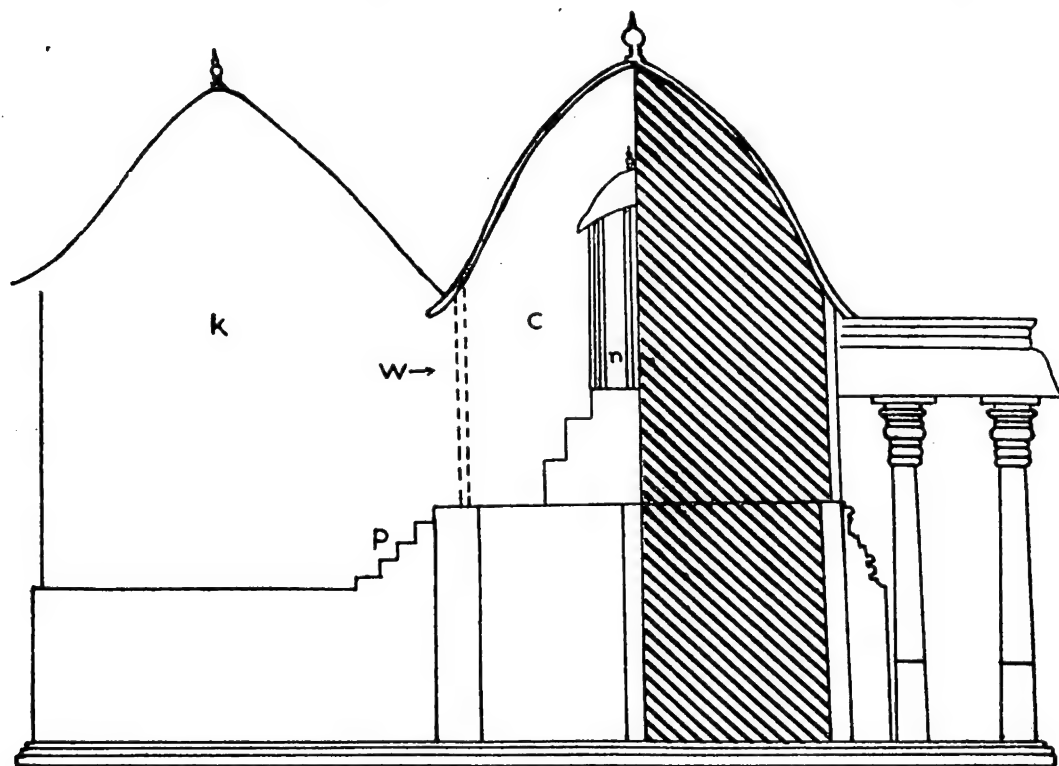


FIG. 2. Side elevation of *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā* sub-complex cutting through the seat of Natarāja: *c* – *cit-sabhā*; *k* – *kanaka-sabhā*; *n* – Natarāja; *p* – *pañcākṣara* steps; *w* – wooden trellis; cross-hatched area—concealed chamber.

icons, 'rahasya', etc., and the northern one (cross-hatched in the accompanying diagrams) which is completely sealed off. The existence of this latter chamber may be ascertained by gauging the narrower length of the *cit-sabhā* from the outside.

Whether the empty chamber on the back of Naṭarāja extends into the stone foundation of the *cit-sabhā* or it stops short at the level of the floor cannot be determined in the existing set-up. It must be noted, however, that the minimum height of the wooden superstructure is shorter than that of the stone basement. This fact makes me suspect that the now completely enclosed part must have led into the hollow of the basement. It is rather strange indeed that neither the kings of the Cōḷa, Pāṇḍya or Vijayanagar dynasties nor the later philanthropists (Somasundaram, 1963), whose temple-building and renovation benefactions are so well known, should have refrained themselves from touching the wooden superstructure of the *cit-sabhā*.

The *Kanaka-sabhā* (K, FIGS. 1, 2), which confronts the southern face of the *cit-sabhā* is again rectangular in cross-sectional area; its longer dimension nearly equals that of the *cit-sabhā* while the narrower arms are a bit shorter as compared with the corresponding sides of the *cit-sabhā* (FIG. 1). Between the *cit* and *kanaka-sabhās* is a pathway about four feet wide and steps are laid at its eastern and western entrances. The centre of the pathway is occupied by the *pañcākṣara* steps connecting the two *sabhās*. The *kanaka-sabhā* has also a raised stone basement, its height, as already noted, being shorter (FIG. 2). The superstructure is again made of wood. The roof, which is identical in shape to that of the *cit-sabhā* but slightly less tall, is supported by pillars on all the four sides. Copper-plated wooden doors are fixed between the pillars.

An epigraph of Kulōttunga III (190 of 1907) states that he constructed a *mukhamantapa* (front porch) for Naṭarāja. According to Somasundaram (1963) this structure is not identifiable now, while, according to Balasubrahmanyam (1943) "it is no longer in existence". A close examination of the sub-complex, particularly from the point of view of architectural disposition of the constituent parts raises a doubt whether the two *sabhās* have been in existence from the very

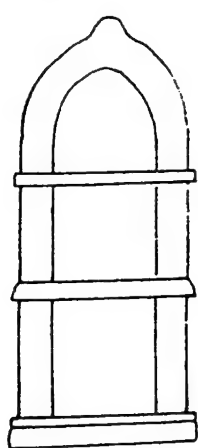
beginning. The presence of the east-west passage between the *sabhās* with entrances at respective ends adds one more point in favour of this doubt. Indeed, these are the only entrances to the sub-complex at present and perhaps have been so for centuries. The different levels of the stone basement of the two *sabhās* are also suggestive of a temporal gap between them.

In this connection an examination of the bas-relief representation of temples in the panels of Airāvātēśvaram at Dārāsuram will be useful. This temple, executed in the reign of Rājarāja II (A.D. 1146–73), contains sculptured panels illustrating episodes from the life of some of the 63 canonized saints of the Śaiva hagiology. In all these panels wherever the replica of a temple is chiselled, the sculptor has chosen to show it in full profile. There may not be any objection to presume that the temples represented in these panels reflect the contemporary architectural patterns.

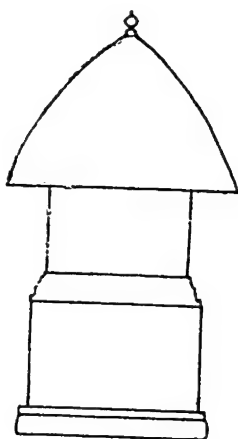
Two of these panels have been interpreted as depicting episodes connected with Chidambaram. The first of these, reproduced as FIG. 1 by Vellaivaranan (1969) is supposed to represent three of the priests of the Naṭarāja temple (*mūvāyiravars*) carrying umbrella, fan and vessel containing food-offering into the shrine. The representation of the shrine, however, in no way suggests that of Naṭarāja nor are there any distinctive features to identify the three human figures as representing the priests. Thus the above interpretation of the panel is untenable and some alternative reading is to be looked for.

The interpretation given for the second panel under consideration appears to be more in keeping with the sculptured episode. This refers to an incident in the life of Saint Nanda (Tirunālaipōvār) when he is supposed to have purified himself through exposure to the flames arising from a specially prepared pit. The standing human figures in the panel are correctly identified as the priests of the Naṭarāja shrine and they are shown with beards and conspicuous hair-knots resting on a side of the head (Vellaivaranan, 1969, FIG. 25). Vellaivaranan identifies the structural representation as the southern *gōpuram* of the Naṭarāja temple. I beg to differ. In the first place, the representation is wholly unlike any *gōpura*. In the second place,

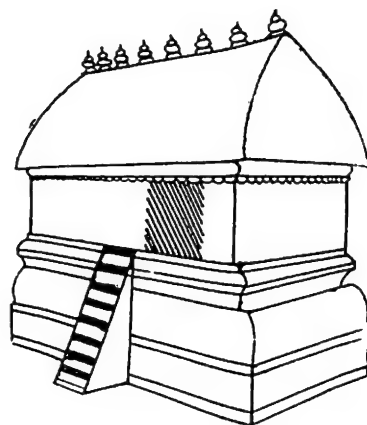
the construction of this *gōpura* was commenced by Kōpperunjinga and was completed in the reign of Jaṭavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya (A. D. 1251–1268) or his successor (Harle, 1963). Thus this *gōpura* was not in existence in the time of Rājarāja II. I am inclined to identify the structure as the profile view of the *cit-sabhā* itself as it existed then. The resemblance of this structure to the existing one is, how-



(3)



(4)



(5)

FIG. 3. Side elevation of *cit-sabha*; outline tracing from the Dhārāsūram panel.

FIG. 4. Outline of the side elevation of the existing *cit-sabha*.

FIG. 5. Three-dimensional reconstruction of the *cit-sabha* after data obtained from the Dhārāsūram panel and Tanjore temple fresco (FIG. 6) as existed before the time of Kulōttunga I.

ever, revealing. FIG. 3 represents the structure as sculptured in the Dhārāsūram panel, and FIG. 4 as the profile of *cit-sabhā* as it is today. The three superimposed parts of the building—the high stone basement, the *sabhā* proper, and the gabled roof—, and their somewhat relative proportions, are unmistakably recognizable in both. FIG. 5 is a reconstruction of the *cit-sabhā* in three-dimensional perspective with the medianly placed stair of steps. It is likely that this part of the *cit-sabhā* was releveled with necessary adjustments during the building of the *mukhamanṭapa* by Kulōttunga III, and may be identified now with the east-west passage between the *cit* and *kanaka-sabhās*. Thus it appears certain that the present *kanaka-sabhā* is an addition made during the first half of the 13th century.

I am led to the same conclusion through another source of evidence. The walls of the circumambulatory passage round the

sanctum of the Brhadīśvara temple, Tanjore, are covered with fresco paintings, "most probably coeval with the temple and belonging to the time of Rājarāja I and Rajendra I" (Nilakaṇṭha Sastri, 1955). Two of these panels depict the *cit-sabhā*. In one, Śiva is performing the *ānanda tāṇḍava* in the *tilla* (*cit-sabhā*) and the detail of a part of the roof is depicted in the background. In the second, the major part

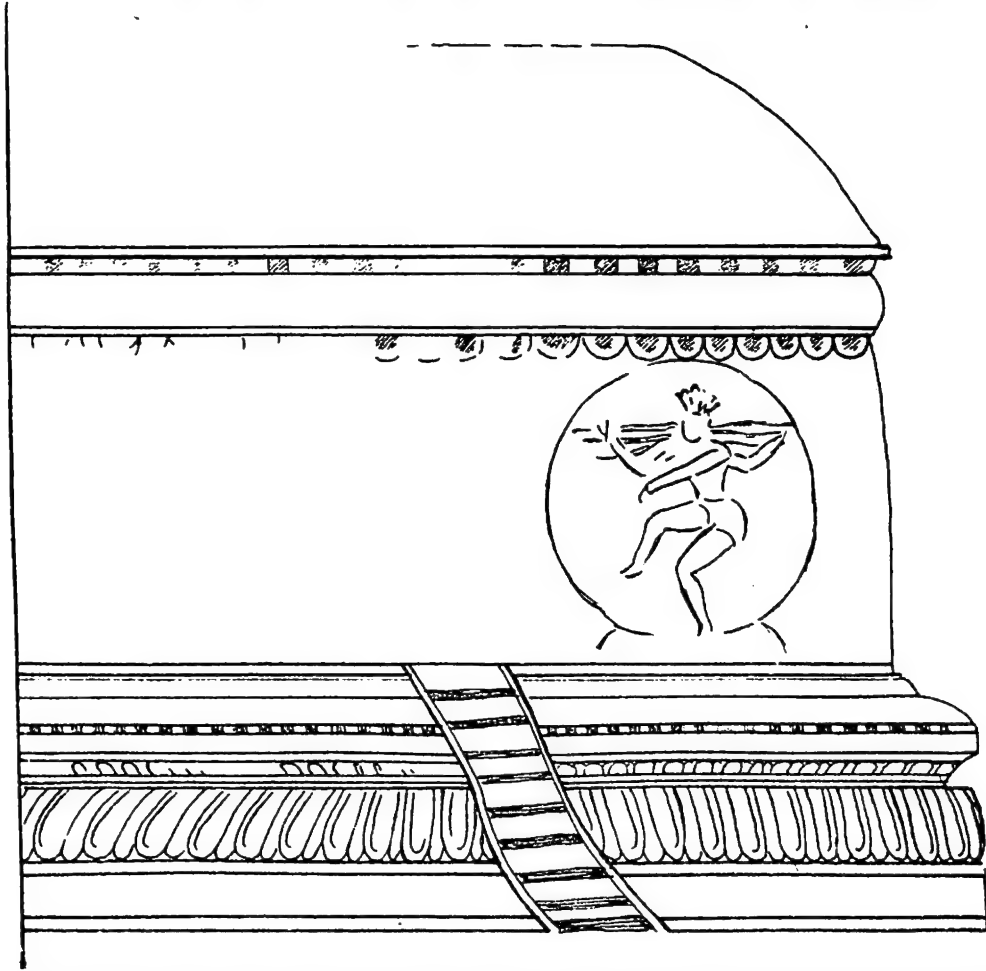


FIG. 6. Fresco from the Brhadisvara temple, Tanjore: front view of the *cit-sabhā* with Naṭarāja.

of this structure is shown in front elevation (FIG. 6). The high stone platform with decorated freizes, the medianly placed flight of steps leading to the middle part of the *tilla* housing the icon of *ānanda tāṇḍava*, and a part of the gabled roof (now mostly faded and discoloured), are all clearly made out. This representation is also

significant in that the position of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon in the *tilla* was at the extreme proper left in contrast to its central locus of today. Thus there was no structure confronting the *cit-sabhā* at that period.

Prior to the addition of *kanaka-sabhā*, all activities of gilding the roof by the Cōḷa kings refer to the gable of the *cit-sabhā* only. Therefore all through the centuries up to the 13th, the *cit-sabhā* (*cirrambalam*) and *kanaka-sabhā* (*ponnambalam*) meant one and the same structure, as this was the only structure to have had a gilded roof. The application of the latter name to the newly added *mukha-maṇṭapa*—by virtue of its gilded roof similar to the one of the *cit-sabhā*—should have come into vogue only after the time of Kulōttunga III.

CHAPTER IV

KŌYIL, PĒRAMBALAM, EDIRAMBALAM AND MŪLASTHĀNA

THERE IS A COMMON BELIEF expressed repeatedly in modern literature to the effect that the temple of Naṭarāja at Chidambaram was known to the First Three *samayācāryas*—Tirugnānasambandar, Tirunāvukkarasar and Sundarar—simply as Kōyil (temple). It is difficult to find the basis for this belief. The *samayācāryas* themselves have not employed this term to designate the Naṭarāja temple. However, Sundarar's *tēvāram* on Kachchūr (VII.41.3) makes use of this term to refer to the temple at that place. Appar sings thus in referring to cit-ambaram: “ambalamum kōyilakakondār tāmē” (291.7) (You have chosen the infinite space as a temple).

All that can be said is that the *tēvāram* singers knew the word *kōyil* to mean a temple, but they did not use it for designating either the Naṭarāja shrine or other shrines. They knew that Lord Śiva ‘resided’ in temples and Tirunāvukkarasar simply expresses his awe that Śiva should have selected for himself the space (cosmos) as abode!

Balasubrahmanyam (1942) feels that “After the recovery of the *tēvāram* hymns in this place (Chidambaram), it became the temple *par excellence* (*kōyil*) of the Śaivites.” This author is obviously referring to the traditional account of the recovery of the *tirumurai-tēvārams* as narrated in the Tirumuraikkandappurāṇam. Although much has been written about the important part played by Nambi-āṇḍār-nambi and Rājarāja I in this effort, it must be frankly admitted that there is no historical basis for the story. That the *tirumurai-tēvārams* were recovered in a room in the Naṭarāja temple is a traditional belief. In spite of these factors, if the *tirumurai-tēvārams* have to be connected with the use of the word *Kōyil*, it is more probable that the person or persons who edited and codified these Books could have interpolated the term as the caption for those composi-

tions that were presumed to have been sung in praise of Lord Naṭarāja at Chidambaram.

The editor of the *tirumūrais* obviously felt embarrassed about the manner in which he should refer to the building of Naṭarāja at Chidambaram. He was aware of the significant deviation that this structure and institution showed in comparison with other Śiva temples that were sung about by the *nāyanmārs*. The invariable vogue of a consecrated *linga* in other temples and its absence in the present case should have disturbed him. However, the *nayānmārs* had sung about this place and a sort of worship was also being conducted to the anthropomorphic form of Śiva instead of a *linga*. Under these circumstances he merely captioned the concerned decades with the generalized, non-committal term *kōyil*, merely meaning *a* temple. Understanding it as *the* temple, as already stated, is a modern innovation.

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Naralōkavīra was a commander of the Cōla king Kulōttunga I (A.D. 1070–1120). An epigraph in the Naṭarāja temple, Chidambaram (*SII*. IV, No. 225; *SITI*, III, ii, Nos. 1271, 1272, 1273. See Appendix A) speaks of his many benefactions to the temple, among which the covering of the *pērambalam* with copper is one. This means that, irrespective of its identity, a structure of this name was already in existence in his time. The 12th century narratives, Kulōttungacōlan ulā and Rājarājacōlan ulā also refer to *Pērambalam* as having received some kind of benefactions from kings. A record of Kulōttunga II states that he gilded the *Pērambalam* (268 of 1903). It should also be noted that Tirugnānasambandar also speaks of *Pērambalam*: *tiraittākkum pērambalam tillaicciṇaivan* (I.80.4).

What this *Pērambalam* is, whether it can be identified now, are points that have not received critical study. Sadasiva Pandarattar (1967) believes that this was the same as *edirambalam*. Harle (1963) is inclined to identify this structure as “the innermost *prākāra* of the temple as it stands today”, while Somasundaram (1966) regards it as the present *dēva-sabhā*. If the latter opinion is accepted, then it follows that the structure should have been in existence in the time

of Kulōttunga I or probably even earlier. Harle (1963) also thinks that this structure (*dēva-sabhā*) “might be a little older than the other surviving buildings” at the same time admitting that “there is no evidence to confirm” his ‘impression’.

At present, the *dēva-sabhā* is located between the first and second *prākāra* in the north-east corner (FIG. 12) and does not appear to bear any relation to the *cit-sabhā* or *mūlasthāna* or even to any of the main *gōpuras*. If the present location of the hall is presumed to have remained unchanged from the time of its erection, its casual location in the temple complex denotes that it could not have been a structure of much importance. Yet, the references cited above are indicative of its having enjoyed a prestige of its own.

In the minds of many there appears to be a logic that the *pērambalam* should be considered as a separate structure, particularly in view of a *cirrambalam* having been in existence. According to them, while *cirrambalam* means *small hall*, *pērambalam* should necessarily be a *large hall*. It has already been shown in Chapter I that such an interpretation of *cirrambalam* is wholly untenable and that it actually means ‘the cosmos of cit (consciousness)’. In view of this meaning, the *pērambalam* cannot be a counterpart of *cit-ambaram*.

The contextual usage of *pērambalam* in Naralōkavīra’s epigraph appears to contain a clue leading towards reconciliation. In the Samskr̥t part of the inscription this structure is called *mahatīm sabhām*, which merely means ‘great hall’. When paraphrased further, it would mean ‘a hall that had attained a great fame of its own’, which appears to be the sense in the Tamil word *pērambalam* rather than being a reference to its physical expanse. ‘*cirrambalattē pērambalattānai*’, therefore, means, “He, of the hall of great fame, in *cit-ambaram*”. The same import is suggested by the poetic expression of Tirugnānasambandar: *tiraitākkum pērambalam* (I.80.4, see comment in Dharmapuram edition). On the basis of these considerations the term *pērambalam* appears to refer to the *cit-ambaram* itself with a different import.

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References to *edirambalam* occur only in three epigraphs of Kulōttunga I, incised during a short span of four years between his

44th and 47th years. One of these records (119 of 1888) states that a precious stone that had been given as a gift to Kulōttunga I by the Kāmbhōja king was “placed in front of the shrine of the god who is the Lord of Tiruchchirrambalam”. This quotation is taken from the translation by Hultzsich published in *EI*, V, pp. 105-6. The concerned text in the original epigraph runs as follows:

inda kallu tiruvedirambalattu tirukkal
 śarattil tirumunpattikku mēlai pattiylē
 vaittadu

A more accurate rendering of the passage appears to be: ‘This stone was placed amongst the series of stones that were just above the front row (of stones) of the edirambalam.’ Accordingly, the newly placed stone would form a part of the front wall of the *edirambalam* itself, while according to Hultzsich’s rendering the placement of the stone would be on a separate structure that was in front of the shrine.

In any case, the identity of the *edirambalam*, however, remains a problem. The Government Epigraphist suggested that it could be the *mūlasthāna* itself (*ARE*, 1914, p. 88); Balasubrahmanyam (1943) and Ramakrishna Aiyar (1946) accept this identity. There appears to be some degree of aptness in this identification especially in view of Harle’s (1963) significant observation that the *mūlasthāna* is a building that directly faces the eastern gateway (*gōpura*), thereby implying that this shrine was in front (*edir*) of the main gateway. However, Harle doubts if the *edirambalam* referred to in 119 of 1888 refers to the *mūlasthāna*.

One major difficulty in accepting the *edirambalam* as the *mūlasthāna* is the usage of the word *ambalam* itself. There is no instance where this term has been employed to designate a shrine in which a Śiva *linga* is consecrated. While the term *ambalam/ambaram* with the prefix *cit* is appropriate in reference to the Naṭarāja-sthāna with its hall-like architectural set-up, it is inapt in the case of the *garbhagrha* (*mūlasthāna*) with its rather basic stereotyped architectural features.

290 of 1913 mentions that this epigraph was re-copied from the original that had been engraved on the *edirambalam*. This step could

have been resorted to for one of the two reasons: (a) either the original had become obliterated, or (b) the building was in the process of renovation or demolition in order to make way for a new construction. The second alternative has been presumed by Harle (1963). He also feels that in case the *edirambalam* is identified with the *mūlasthāna* and if it is the above-mentioned epigraph that had been originally engraved on the wall of the *mūlasthāna*, "the present shrine of that name cannot have been built until the end of the 12th century". Under these circumstances, the *edirambalam* appears to have been a structure similar in plan and construction to a hall or *sabhā* which should have faced some other building, possibly, the *cit-sabhā* itself.

Attempts have been made to identify the *edirambalam* with the *Nṛtta-sabhā*. This proposal has an air of plausibility, both from the points of view of location (directly in front of the *cit-sabhā*) and 'open' hall-like architectural feature. Unfortunately there is no evidence in literature that this structure was referred to by an alternative name, *edirambalam*. The real snag in accepting this identification is, however, the lack of data on the date of construction of the *Nṛtta-sabhā*. "It is ascribed to Chōla king Kulōttunga III" (Somasundaram, 1963). There is no clue that throws light on the period of construction of this structure in the available epigraphic literature, and until new evidence turns up, it is to be presumed that *edirambalam* cannot be identified with any of the existing buildings in the temple complex.

The date of the *Nṛtta-sabhā* cited by Somasundaram may not be improbable on other considerations. *Maṇṭapas*, corridors and other accessory structures in South Indian temples are generally of later origin. *Ratha-maṇṭapas* came into vogue in the 12th century (Mahalingam, 1970) and this could be true of the *Nṛtta-sabhā* of Naṭarāja temple complex, particularly in view of its unmistakable character of a *ratha-maṇṭapa* of the Cōla idiom. This again indicates that this structure cannot be the *edirambalam* of Kulōttunga Cōla I.

It is doubtful if there was a *mūlasthāna* shrine within the *prākāra* walls prior to the 13th century. Tirunāvukkarasar's reference to a *mūlasthāna* at Perumbarrappuliyūr occurs in his *tāṇḍakam* composition on Tiruvīlīmīlāi (VI. 51.6). Some authors understand this

as referring to the *mūlasthāna* shrine in the Naṭarāja temple complex (Dandapani Desikar, 1949). Such an understanding is untenable as there is every possibility of its being identified with any other *mūlasthāna* situated at Perumbarrappuliyūr, say, even the Anantīśvaram temple.

Balasubrahmanyam's discovery of a fragmentary epigraph of Āditya I (1943, inscription No. 5) is stated to refer to a *tirumūlasthāna*. This inscription is found on "a slab built into the floor of the 3rd *prākāra* of the Naṭarāja temple". One cannot be very sure that this slab formed a part of the Naṭarāja temple complex. Furthermore, it is not clear if the (*mūlasthāna*) *perumān* specifically refers to the shrine of that name in this temple.

None of the Cōla benefactors until the time of Kulōttunga I refers to the *mūlasthāna* in the epigraphs found in the Naṭarāja temple. In Naralōkavīra's inscription (Appendix A) we find a verse:

pratiprasta sahasrēṇa
mūlasthāna nivāsinām
atrābhiṣēkam pratyabhyam
īśam prādāt parāmsriyam

Although the term *mūlasthāna* here is presumed to refer to the shrine in the second *prākāra* of the Naṭarāja temple (Subramaniam, 1957), the stanza itself is not explicit about it. The corresponding Tamil verse makes no mention of the deity to whom the *abhiṣēka* gift was intended. Is it not probable that the gift was meant for Naṭarāja himself? This doubt arises in view of the preceding Samskr̥t verses referring to a variety of endowments for this deity and to 'tillaichchiṛrambalam'. It is not unlikely that because of the exceptional absence of a consecrated deity, the hall where the image of Naṭarāja lay was itself referred to as the *mūlasthāna* as a poetic idiom.

Kōpperunjinga appears to be the first to refer to the *mūlasthāna* shrine in unmistakable terms, and in all likelihood, it represents the existing structure of the same name. We learn from this inscription that endowments were instituted for conducting five *sandhipūjas* to the image of Dakṣiṇāmūrti as was the custom in the *mūlasthāna*

shrine (305, 307 of 1913, A.D. 1250, 1260 respectively). An undated inscription, perhaps of about the same period or some time later, speaks of the provision made for singing *pāmālai* in the shrine of tirumūlattānamuḍaiyār (341 of 1913). References to this shrine in subsequent years strangely disappear with the very same suddenness with which they appeared.

According to legends and traditions, the *mūlasthāna* shrine forms a very important component of the Naṭarāja temple complex. It is the *svayambhu linga* installed in this shrine that was worshipped by Sage Vyāghrapāda, a belief that necessarily carries with it the impression that the shrine is of ancient origin. Yet the fact that only three out of nearly 300 epigraphs of the Naṭarāja temple refer to this shrine is surprising. There appears to be something lacking in this *mūlasthāna* shrine as compared with those of the medieval period. By the 13th century many of the Śiva temples in the Tamil country had attained their full architectural and sculptural components. The *mūlasthāna* in particular was complete with all its accessory *kōṣṭha* images, the most ubiquitous ones being Lingodbhava, Durgā, Vināyaka and Dakṣiṇāmūrti. Granting that the existing *mūlasthāna* shrine in the Naṭarāja temple complex has undergone repeated reconstruction and renovation, it is hard to understand why only the last two of the *kōṣṭha* deities have been installed with icons leaving the idiom of *mūlasthāna* incomplete. A careful analysis of the physical aspects of these two *kōṣṭhas* is indicative that they should have come into existence as the result of an afterthought. Glibly believing that the Naṭarāja-*sthāna* received all attention and therefore the *mūlasthāna* was relegated to the background all the time is one of the methods of superficial reconciliation. But at the same time it is pertinent to ask, "If the *mūlasthāna* shrine was the nucleus of the Naṭarāja temple complex as the tradition asserts, wouldn't the benefactors have paid a little more attention to this shrine as well?" Or, could it be that the *mūlasthāna* (which merely means the 'primeval seat'), alternatively known as *garbhagrha* ('house of womb', that is, the 'locus of implantation'), did not come into existence earlier than the 13th century? It is well to bear in mind that constructional activities in the Naṭarāja temple complex ceased soon after this century, and therefore the *mūlasthāna* shrine was obliged to be left in the state in which it is today. The growing importance

of Naṭarāja was of course a contributory factor for the lack of interest shown in reference to the *mūlasthāna* shrine in later periods.

After a detailed analytical study of the *gōpuras* of the Naṭarāja temple, Harle (1963) came to the following conclusions in reference to the dates of construction of these structures:

	Commencement	Completion
East	Between 1178 and 1218 (Kulōttunga III)	1251-1268 (Jaṭavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya)
West	About 1150 (Harle's personal opinion)	1251-1268 (Jaṭavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya)
North	(Harle thinks it unlikely that this "was started much after A.D. 1300 because of the worsening political situation at that time")	
South	1248 (Kōpperunginga)	1248-1272 (Jaṭavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya)

Thus, excepting the North *gōpura* about which nothing is stated with certainty, the remaining three were commenced and completed in the 13th century. Could it be that the *mūlasthāna* shrine was also erected in the times of Jaṭavarman Sundara Pāṇḍya and Kōpperunjinga? It is significant to note that the latter ruler's name is unmistakably associated with both the *mūlasthāna* and the East *gōpura*. Is it not likely that the construction of these two structures in positions facing each other some time during the second and third quarters of the 13th century could have imparted a *seeming east-west* axis of orientation to the temple complex or, more specifically, to a part of the temple complex? (see Harle, 1963, for discussion).

One of the theoretical implications may also be mentioned here. As will be shown later, the Naṭarājā cult does not involve the worship of a consecrated (*sthāvara*) *linga*. The cult itself appears to be the outcome of pure philosophical speculation unlike many other cults/religions on which philosophical concepts have been superimposed later on. Nor does this cult imply the *worship* of a deity in the general sense. On the contrary, it prescribes meditation and *yōga* of a specific kind (*Kuṇḍalini* system, ac-

according to Sinha, 1970) as means to Realization. Thus, in the earlier stages of stabilization of the cult in the Tamil country, it retained its original purity. Customs, rituals and traditions of the land gradually worked their way into the cult, particularly as a consequence of royal patronage. The presence of a consecrated *linga*-shrine and other paraphernalia are evidently later superimpositions. It is significant that many of these, however, have not been completely absorbed into the Naṭarāja cult even today.

CHAPTER V

THE GÖVINDARĀJA SHRINE

ACCORDING TO SEVERAL AUTHORS the history of the Gōvindarāja shrine within the Naṭarāja temple complex can be traced back to the 8th century A.D., probably to the regnal years of Nandivarman Pallavamalla (Balasubrahmanyam, 1943). This contention is based wholly on certain literary references. The very nature of this source raises serious doubts whether one is justified in leaning so heavily on the type of information contained in highly imaginative and emotionally guided works of literature. A critical evaluation of such materials is therefore necessary.

(1) Tirumangai-ālvār, whose date is uncertain (estimates varying from the 8th to 12th centuries), refers to a Viṣṇu shrine in the “tiruchchitrakūṭa” of “Tillai”:

paimponṇu muttam maṇiyuñ koṇarntu
pataimaṇṇavar pallavarkōṇpaṇinta
śemponmaṇi māḍaṇkaḷ śūḷnta tillait
tiruccitrakūṭaṇcenṇu śērmiṇkaḷē

Ōṭumā kaṭaluñ kiṭantānuvantu
kavainā varavi naṇaippaḷliyinmēl
tirumāl tirumaṇikai yōṭātu tillait
tiruccitra kūṭam

mūvāyiranān maṇai yāḷar nāḷum
muṇaiyāl vaṇaṇikav vaṇankāya śōtit
tēvāti tēvan tikaḷkiṇṇa tillait
tiruccitra kūṭam

The first stanza speaks of a Pallava king who made costly gifts to the shrine. According to Krishnaswami Aiyangar (*Ind. Ant.*, 35:288-93) the author of the quotation lived in the earlier half of the 8th century A.D. This date has been obviously accepted by those who would favour the existence of the “tiruchchitrakūṭam” at

“Tillai” in the 8th century (identifying these with the present Gōvindarāja shrine and the Naṭarāja temple complex, respectively). The date proposed by Krishnaswami Aiyangar for Tirumangai-ālvār is by no means infalliable. His arguments are purely circumstantial. Furthermore, there is absolutely no clue in the poems of Tirumangai to identify the Pallava donor with any specific person of that dynasty. Even after the end of the imperial line of the Pallavas, petty feudatories and descendents (Kāḍuveṭṭis, Nolumba-Pallavas, Kōpperunjinga, etc.) claimed themselves to be of Pallava descent and continued to exercise power over small areas. The Pallava in the above poem may as well denote one such chief.

The word “Tillai” in the stanzas is to be understood not as referring to the Naṭarāja shrine proper, nor to the temple complex at Chidambaram, but only as indicating an area around it (Chapter II). The phrase “*māḍangaḷ sūḷnda tiruchchitra kūṭaṇ*” should be paraphrased as “the Citrakūṭa in which place tall buildings” existed. In other words, Citrakūṭa appears to have been used to denote an area, just as Tillai (cf. *māḍamāḷigai sūḷt-tillai*).

(2) Kulaśekhara-ālvār, whose date again is uncertain, refers to the city of Tillai with much more precision:

śentalirvāi malarnakaiśōr seḷuntan śōḷait
tillainakart tiruccitra kūṭan taṇṇu
ḷantanark ka ḷorumūvāyirava rēṭta
vaṇimaiyā kanattamarnta vammāṇṇāṇē

The stanza simply states that Viṣṇu was reclining on a throne in Tiruccitrakūṭam which was situated in the city of Tillai (Tillai-nagar), which in turn was surrounded by “cool, shady gardens smiling with flowers and tender shoots”. It also conveys that “3000 *andaṇars*” were chanting his praises. It should be noted that there is no suggestion whatever to identify these “3000 *andaṇars*” with the ‘Tillai-Three-thousand’ of the Naṭarāja shrine (Chapter II).

(3) The oft-quoted reference in favour of the existence of the Viṣṇu shrine within the precincts of the Naṭarāja temple complex is taken from Tiruccirrambalakkōvai. It states that Viṣṇu was lying in the courtyard of Tillai in the expectation of looking at the standing right foot after having had the sight of the lifted left foot:

purañkaṭan tānaṭi kānpān puvinintu pukkariya
 tirañkiten tāyeṇ ṛirappattan vīratik keṇṇirantu
 karañkatan tānonṇu kattamaṇṇāñkatun kātṭeṇṇu
 varañkitan tāṇṇillaiyambala munṇilam māyavanē

The author of these lines is undoubtedly a person endowed with great literary faculties. If poetry is to be appreciated as aesthetic expression, too literal an interpretation of words should be eschewed. The purport here is to praise the glories of the feet of Lord Naṭarāja which even Viṣṇu admired. This is only a variation of the hackneyed *purāṇic* theme of Viṣṇu worshipping Śiva. Here the former has come down to witness the *ānanda-tāṇḍava* of Naṭarāja (Śiva). That the content of the quotation is only a poetic fancy has been accepted by some authors (e.g. Balasubrahmanyam 1942). Viṣṇu worshipping Śiva and vice versa are old and frequent themes in the mythical lore of Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites.

The next set of citations are chosen from verse compositions of semi-historical content. From these it is extremely difficult to determine which of the incidents narrated are historical and how much of exaggeration or distortion has been interpolated into them by the poet. The pertinent incident refers to the dislodgement of the Viṣṇu image by the Cōḷa king identified as Kulōttunga II (A.D. 1178-1216). The Kulōttungaccōḷan-ulā and Rājarājaccōḷan-ulā of Oṭṭakkūttan refer to the renovation or extension of some structures of the Naṭarāja temple complex during which the image of Viṣṇu was thrown into the sea. The quotation from Takkayākapparāṇi of the same author implies that the king had to do this in order to expand the precincts of the temple complex.

panavi muḷutuṭaiya poṇṇāṭiyun tāṇum
 avani śurarśuruti yārppa-navaniti tōyn
 tōṭṭaṇ karuñkataṭu ḷellaiyilā ṇṭak
 kūṭṭaik kaḷikkūrak kumpiṭṭup-poṇṇinamēṇ
 ṇillait tirumaṇṇin ḷaṇṇiṇ-śiṇṇutēyvat
 toḷlaik kuṇumpu tokutteṭuttu

—Kulōttungaccōḷan ulā
 tiruvē tirumālai

śūṭṭat tirumakuṭaṇi śūṭṭiyapin-ṇāṭaṭu
 poṇṇiṇ kuyiṇṇiṇ puṇampiṇ kuṇumpanaittu
 muṇṇiṇ kaṭalkaḷil mūḷkuvitta-śeṇṇi
 tirumakal śīrāja rājan

—Rājarājaccōḷan ulā

muṇṇiṭ kiṭanta kuruṇkaṭal pōy muṇṇai kaṭal
 pukappiṇṇait tillai
 maṇṇuk kiṭankaṭa koṇṭal peṇṇa marakata
 mēruvai vāḷttuvanē
 —Takkayākapparāṇi

The incident has already been repeatedly discussed (Mahalingam, 1940; Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946; Subramanian, 1957; Sadasiva Pandarattar, 1967), and there appears to be a general agreement amongst the authors that there had been a Viṣṇu shrine in the Naṭarāja temple complex before it was dismantled by Kulōttunga II. However, Ramakrishna Aiyer is reluctant to fall in line with this view, while Aruvamuthan (1962/5) is quite vehement that the Viṣṇu shrine then stood at the same place as it stands today.

As explained in Chapter I, Perumbarrappuliyūr was constituted of several hamlets and the area in the immediate vicinity of the Naṭarāja shrine came to be called Tillainagar, or Tillai as abbreviation. If the literary references to Tillai are to be accepted in a wider sense (which I think is the correct import), as a comprehensive term to include not only the Naṭarāja shrine but also some area around it, the location of the Viṣṇu shrine should be taken as having been in Tiruccittirakūṭam which must have been an area adjoining Tillainagar. If credence is to be given for the narratives of Oṭṭakkūttan, it only means that there was a Viṣṇu shrine in the area somewhere in the Tillai hamlet; that it was not a structure directly connected with the Naṭarāja temple complex, but lay somewhere nearby; that Kulōttunga II, while executing his ambitious plan of expanding the precincts of the Naṭarāja temple found an impediment in this structure; and that he therefore had it dismantled. Ramakrishna Aiyer (1946) has already pointed out the difficulties in accepting the identity of Kulaśēkhara-ālvār's Viṣṇu shrine (*tiruccitrakūṭa*) with the present one. Again, if it is to be believed that Kuncitapādāṅghristavam attributed to the authorship of Umāpati-śivācārya records a statement of fact (stanza 42) that the reclining Viṣṇu image had its head towards the North and legs pointing towards the South, it follows that either the image in the shrine was in a reversed position at that time, or the shrine itself was then facing the West and not the East as today.

Although Kulōttunga I initiated the construction of the Pārvati shrine, it is Kulōttunga II who caused the addition of *maṇṭapas*, corridors, enclosure walls, etc. In this endeavour he could have demolished a Viṣṇu shrine that stood as an obstruction. The existing Viṣṇu shrine within the Naṭarāja temple complex, therefore, was certainly not the one that faced destruction, as it never existed there!

In any case, the acts of Kulōttunga appears to have caused great resentment amongst the Vaiṣṇavite folk to the extent of calling him names (e.g. *Krimikanṭha*) and giving a twist to the incident in order to evoke sectarian sympathy (Prapannāmṛtam of Anantārya). The recovery of the Viṣṇu image by Rāmānujācārya and its consecration in a shrine built at lower Tirupati are further episodes (historically questionable) narrated in Prapannāmṛtam.

It is significant to note that the Vijayanagar king, Krishna-dēvarāya, worshipped and made endowments to Lord Naṭarāja (323 of 1913, A.D. 1510) and also completed (?) the northern gopura (174, 175, 371 of 1913) of the Naṭarāja temple, but makes no mention of the Gōvindārāja shrine. With his well authenticated bias for Vaiṣṇavism, one would expect him to have made at least a token gift to this shrine if it had been in existence then within the Naṭarāja temple complex.

We hear of the consecration of the image of Gōvindarāja in its present locale *for the first time* in the reign of Acyutarāya. For those who presume an earlier existence of this shrine within the temple complex of Naṭarāja, Acyuta's act would indicate a *reconsecration*. As shown already, there is no valid evidence for such an assumption, the concerned passages from texts lending themselves to be interpreted in a different way, thereby pointing to the locale of the Viṣṇu shrine somewhere else nearby but not as a part of the Naṭarāja temple complex. It could be this Viṣṇu shrine that must have been dismantled in the time of Kulōttunga II, should it be construed as a historical incident. No one knows what exactly happened to the idol subsequently, although certain legends connecting this incident with Rāmānujācārya are woven in Vaiṣṇavite traditional literature. All that one can guess is that if the image had been of terra-cotta as it is today, it must have gotten destroyed completely during dismantling process and no question of recovery therefore arises.

The unambiguous phrase “*gōvindarājarai pratiṣṭai paṇṇivairru*” (‘having done the consecration of Gōvindarāja’) occurring in the epigraph of Acyutarāya (272 of 1913, A.D. 1539) is to be taken in the literal sense that it was *for the first time* that the Gōvindarāja shrine came into existence *within* the Naṭarāja temple complex in the same topographical relationship as it bears today. Mahalingam’s observation (1940) that “No foundation of a permanent character seems to have been laid for the new shrine (of Gōvindarāja) for the steps, floral designs and freizes even now seen all round the *prākāra* walls and *maṇṭapas* were also to be seen when the shrine of Gōvindarāja was demolished recently for carrying out certain repairs and improvements in the Vaiṣṇava shrine” confirms that this structure was superimposed on a Cōla foundation.

As remarked by earlier authors, it is worth noting in this connection that none of the epigraphs of the Cōlas and Pāṇdyas, Kōpperunjunga, and also of Vijayanagar rulers until the time of Acyutarāya, makes any mention of a Viṣṇu shrine within the Naṭarāja temple complex. It is difficult to believe that these rulers, who have exhibited positive evidences of tolerance to faiths other than their own, should have excluded this Viṣṇu shrine alone from their list of benefactions. This shrine would not have escaped their attention had it been present in its present position.

With particular reference to the earlier kings of the Vijayanagar dynasties it should be observed that they were much more catholic in outlook in religious matters than many other dynasties. They encouraged all religious faiths without distinction. Furthermore, they were practically the patrons for the founders of the *smārta* religious order, and according to the tenets of this faith, the followers should not distinguish between Śiva and Viṣṇu. This attitude was the guideline for the later Vijayanagar kings as well. It is quite possible that Acyutarāya, who had grown in this tradition, felt a natural urge to see Lord Viṣṇu side by side with Lord Śiva (Naṭarāja) who was being worshipped at Chidambaram and as epigraphic record clearly shows, fulfilled his desire.

Prapannāmṛtam attributes the consecration of the Viṣṇu image to Mahācārya (Doḍḍācārya) of Shōliṅghūr, while the Vaiṣṇava Guruparampara makes Gōpaṇācārya as the consecrator who was

requested to do so by Vēdāntadēśika (Srinivasachari, 1941). To what extent these contradictory statements deserve credence for historical purposes is anybody's guess in the light of clinching epigraphic evidence.

When the image of Gōvindarāja was enshrined according to the principles of Vaikhānasa sūtra, the donor gave 500 *pon*, which was the income from four villages as expenses towards daily worship; he also made provision for the conduct of certain festivals. We do not know the reactions of the clergy of the Naṭarāja shrine to this intrusion of a Vaiṣṇavite deity into their territory. From what is to be seen of later history one has to only surmise that they were not happy about it. Perhaps in grateful recognition of the munificent benefactions which they had received from the predecessors of Acyutarāya their now damaged feelings lay dormant brewing. Their resentment had a sort of justification in a way in that their own religious and philosophical following was fundamentally different from Vaiṣṇavism. Their faith, however, was neither the dualistic Gōlaki school of Śaivism which was the dominant contemporary religion of the Tamil country (Swamy, 1972) nor the non-dualistic faith followed by the Śamkara school (Chapter X) who were also sparsely distributed in the country. Thus the presence of Viṣṇu in such close physical proximity must have given rise to a feeling of dejection and frustration, though not hatred, in the minds of the clergy of the Naṭarāja temple, in spite of the endowments they had received from Acyutarāya himself in A.D. 1530 for conducting car festivals and for repairs to the temple of Chidambarēśvara (2 of 1935/6). There must have been occasions when such feelings came up to the surface when independent festivals or rituals were being conducted in the two shrines. Perhaps as a result of such frictions the worship in the Viṣṇu shrine had to be terminated. Pimenta's eye-witness account appears to imply that the image had been removed and the shrine itself badly damaged or destroyed (Srinivasachari, 1941).

We learn that Krishnappa Nāyaka of Ginjee, in A.D. 1597, nearly 60 years after the first consecration of Gōvindarāja by Acyutarāya, was in the act of causing re-erection and possibly structural additions to the shrine. The narration of Pimenta [cited by Srinivasachari (1941, 1943)] clearly indicates the explosion of the

already brewing feelings of the Śaiva clergy of the Naṭarāja shrine. At first they threatened that they would commit suicide in case the renovation work was carried through and declared that the new structure would have to be erected over their graves. Seeing that Krishnappa Nāyaka was determined to complete the work, 12 members of the clergy (priests) climbed one of the *gōpuras* and cast themselves. Krishnappa Nāyaka, Pimenta says, became angry and ordered his gunners to shoot the remaining ones; in this encounter two more died.

The next great renovation work of the Gōvindarāja shrine was executed by Srīrangarāya in A.D. 1644. He repaired the *manṭapa* in front of the Gōvindarāja *sannidhi*, the *gōpura* of the shrine, the *vimanas* of Goddess Puṇḍarīkavalli and of Śūttikkoḍuttanācciyār, and also the *manṭapa* in front of the shrine of Tiruvali-ālvān (271 of 1913). The subsequent history of the Viṣṇu shrine is a chapter of frequent rivalries, disputes and quarrels of sectarian character (Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946; Somasundaram, 1963).

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The Vaiṣṇavite works that refer to the episode of the Gōvindarāja shrine are Prapannāmṛtam, Guruparampara, Kōyilulugu and Divyasūri caritam. All these were written a long time after the incidents which they speak of. The first work was written in the early decades of the 17th century, and the remaining ones sometime during the post-Acyutarāya period. The deconsecration of the Gōvindarāja image from Tillai, its rescue by Rāmānujācārya, its enshrinement in a newly built temple at Tirupati and the efforts of one Gōpaṇācārya in having re-consecrated the image (brought back from Tirupati?) in its original shrine at Tillai, are episodes narrated in this set of literature. It is needless to say that the tenor of treatment given to these incidents fully conforms to the standards which the authors have chosen to follow in their works—exaggeration, self-pity, respect to tradition, intolerance of faiths other than their own, etc. Even when some presumably historical materials are handled, they are shrouded in welts of these qualities so much so the historical element eludes to be extracted out.

The identification of *Krimikanṭha* with Kulōttunga II is by no means agreed upon by scholars (Nilakanta Sastri, 1935). It has

already been pointed out that the incidents mentioned in the compositions of some of the Vaiṣṇavite ālvārs, in Tiruccirrambalakkōvai and in the *ulās*, do not decisively place the Gōvindarāja shrine strictly within the Naṭarāja temple complex and that even should a Viṣṇu idol had been displaced by Kulōttunga II, it could have been one that was outside the precincts of the Naṭarāja temple. We also know that there was tremendous opposition for the renovation work that had been undertaken by Krishnappa Nāyaka of Ginjee, 60 years after the consecration of the Gōvindarāja shrine in its present locus, during which period the image had been de-consecrated and the shrine damaged. This was such an eventful happening and consequence that it stayed on in memory with added sectarian colour and tenor. Is it not probable that the authors of the Vaiṣṇavite hagiological literature mentioned above could have incorporated the 16th century incident mixing it up with the time of Rāmānujācārya? *Krimikanṭha* is nothing more than a typified villainous character and may possibly refer to the leader who caused the dismantling of the Gōvindarāja idol sometime between A.D. 1359 and 1597. Is it not likely that for the sake of imparting a seeming historicity to the whole episode, the authors have designated him as Kulōttunga, thereby meaning a Cōḷa? (Nilakanta Sastri, 1935).

* * *

There appears to be an opinion in certain quarters, though not given publicity in print, that the present *cit-sabhā* was initially the *tiruccitrakūṭam* itself where the reclining Viṣṇu image had been consecrated; that this was the deity referred to in the Vaiṣṇavite hymns (cited on p. 46-49); that the structure was converted into a Śaivite institution after the time of Kulōttunga I; and that the Viṣṇu image was removed, its locus walled off and the '*rahasya*' panel installed during the times of Kulōttunga II and Rājarāja II, subsequent to which the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon was consecrated. It is unfortunate that there is no historical evidence to substantiate this hypothesis. The presumed dates of the Vaiṣṇavite hymnists who sang about the *Tiruccitrakūṭam* Viṣṇu of Tillai, as remarked already, are not unquestionably determined, just as those of the Śaivite *nāyanmārs*. Under these circumstances, employing their compositions for establishing a chronological sequence results in wholly distorted and therefore undependable conclusions.

CHAPTER VI

THE TEMPLE COMPLEX IN CHRONOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

THERE ARE FIVE SABHĀS or halls in the Naṭarāja temple complex which, according to the *sthalapurāṇas* (e.g., Tilavavanamāhātmyam), are of great age. Of these, the *cit-sabhā* is believed to have been constructed by Viśvakarma himself, a deep-rooted tradition, which had to be admitted by the Courts of Law as evidence in legal proceedings (Chapter VII). Of the remaining, four halls—*Kanaka-sabhā* forming a sub-complex with the *cit-sabhā* (Chapter III), *Dēva-sabhā*, *Nṛtta-sabhā* and *Rāja-sabhā*—are scattered in the complex with no relation to one another in time or space. The only architectural feature common to all the *sabhās* is the four-sided gable-like roof supported by pillars, which stylistic feature, however, should not be adduced as evidence in favour of these *sabhās* being of contemporaneous origin.

All authors—either traditional or free-thinking—agree that the *cit-sabhā* (equated with sanctum sanctorum) is not only the nucleus but also the oldest part of the temple complex. By a method of working backwards in time, one is led to surmise that this was the only important part of the temple complex that was in existence before the time of Kulōttunga I (A.D. 1070–1120), possibly enclosed by a temporary wall or fence delimiting territorial limits. It is also in keeping to presume the existence of a couple of dwelling houses in or around the enclosure. In spite of the rather humble area it occupied and the simplicity of construction, the structure must have become well known on account of its having enjoyed royal patronage, one such benefaction being the gilded roof. Incidentally, it may be noted that, of all the temples in the Tamil country, the one at Chidambaram figures as the first to have this distinction conferred on it by the Cōḷa king, Parāntaka I (A.D. 907–955).

Until the reign of Kulōttunga I we do not hear of any structural additions to the *cit-ambaram*. However, the act of gilding this

structure was repeated by some of the succeeding rulers or by the royalty of the Cōḷa dynasty—Parāntaka I, Kundavai (sister of Rājarāja) and Kulōttunga I. Rājarāja's adoration of Naṭarāja is exemplified by his installation of a bronze replica of this deity in the Rājarājēśvaram temple. Rājendra I made a gift of land to the temple at Chidambaram, the income from which was to be used for the maintenance of the institution (118 of 1888).

Naralōkavīra's inscription (Appendix A) mentions of his building a great wall called after his name with two towers around the *sabhāpati* shrine (verses 8, 9), a 100-pillared hall (verse 10),

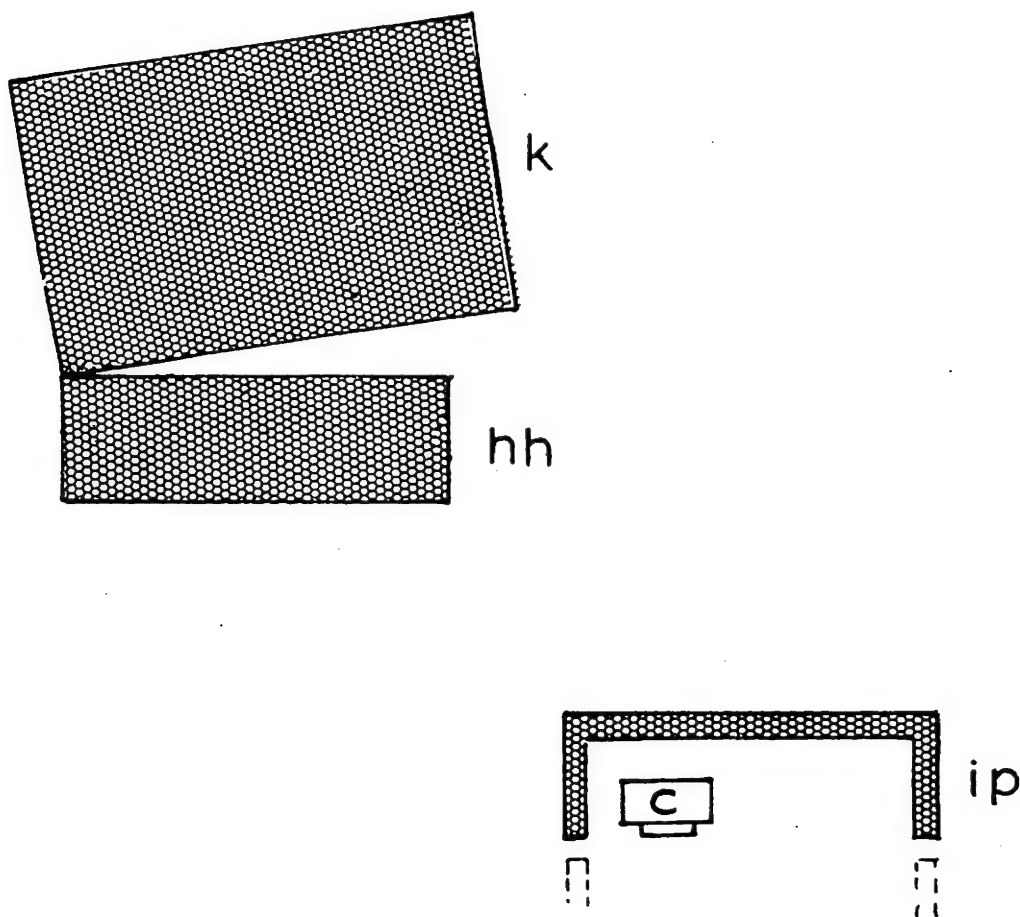


FIG. 7. Structural additions to the Naṭarāja temple complex (shaded parts) during the regnal years of Kulōttunga I and Vikrama (A.D. 1070-1135). *c*—cit-sabha *hh*—hundred-pillared hall; *ip*—inner prakāra wall; *k*—kāmakoṭṭam.

prākāra and *maṇṭapa* around the shrine of Pārvati (*kāmakōṭṭam*) (verses 28, 30). As this donor was an officer under Kulōttunga I and as it is probable that he carried out these constructional benefactions with the concurrence or partial financial assistance from the ruling monarch, some of these structures have come to be known after the king's name, for example, the innermost *prākāra* wall (*Kulōttunga Cōlan Tirumāligai*). Obviously many of these structures could not have reached the intended target of completion during the life-time of Kulōttunga I, and it is surmised by historians that his son and successor, Vikrama, saw to the completion of the spilt-over part of the work. The traditional association of both Kulōttunga I and Vikrama in reference to the first (innermost) *prākāra* wall and Pārvati shrine is meaningful in this connection. The new structures that were added from the time of Kulōttunga I to that of Kulōttunga II are represented as shaded areas in FIG. 7. Harley (1963) suspects that the foundation of the West *gōpura* was commenced around A.D. 1150.

When Kulōttunga II began the expansion work for the Pārvati shrine, it is possible that he had to demolish some of the existing structures. The locus of this shrine, as may be seen from its present position, is strictly outside the limits of the two inner *prākāra* walls, and almost bordering on the third *prākāra* wall. If it is Kulōttunga II who dismantled a Viṣṇu shrine so as to allow for his plans of expansion of the Naṭarāja temple complex, is it not likely that this shrine had been located in a position obstructing the proposed plan of expansion of the Pārvati shrine? (Chapter V).

There are no records of Rājarāja II referring to the building work of the Naṭarāja shrine during his fairly long period of 27 years; nor are there any epigraphs mentioning his endowments to Naṭarāja. Could it be that this is so because of his involvement in wars against the Pāṇḍyas and also to the deteriorated overall conditions in the empire (Sadasiva Pandarattar, 1967)? If, as Harle (1963) thinks, the foundation of the West *gōpura* had been commenced in about A.D. 1150—which is the closing year of Kulōttunga II—it is likely that Rājarāja II, who succeeded him could have continued the work.

With the ascendancy of Kulōttunga III (A.D. 1178–1215) we see a revival of constructional activities in the temple. The front porch

(called *kanaka-sabhā* at present in the strict sense, Chapter III) for the *cit-sabhā*, the second *prākāra* wall, *nṛtta-sabhā* and at least the foundation and initial superstructure of the 1000-pillared hall are

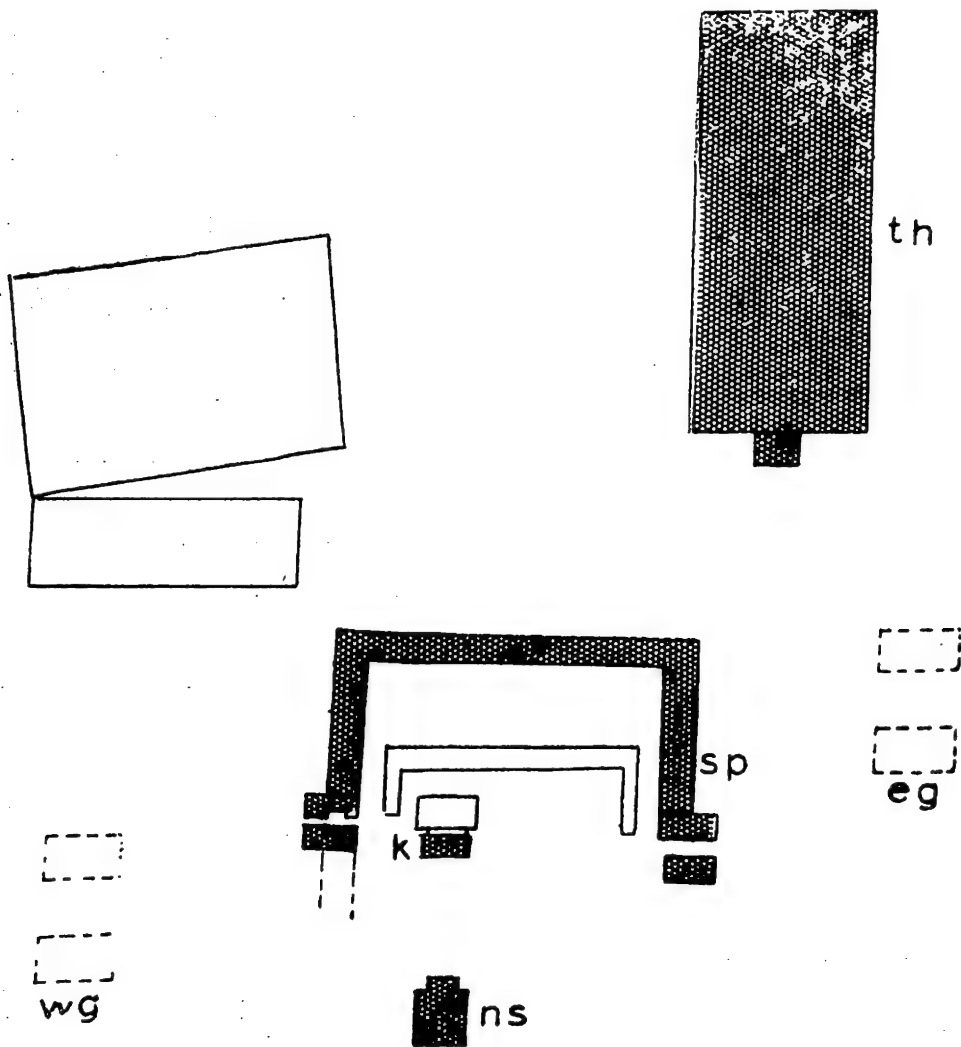


FIG. 8. Structural additions to the Naṭarāja temple complex (shaded parts) between the regnal years of Kulōttunga II (A.D. 1133-1150) and Kulōttunga III (A.D. 1178-1216): e.g. - foundation of the eastern *gōpura*; k - *kanaka-sabhā*; ns - *nṛtta-sabhā* (ratha-mantapa); sp - second *prākāra* wall; th - thousand pillared hall; wg - foundation of the western *gōpura*.

associated with his reign. The basement of the East *gōpura* was also constructed during the same period, and possibly, a portion of the wall extending north and south of this structure (FIG. 8).

Although the Cōla dynasty continued to hold ground for the next 42 years after Kulōttunga III, the outlay of the temple complex remained unaltered. However, benefactions by way of land gifts, establishment of gardens, etc., during the reign of Rājarāja III went a long way in stabilizing the temple as an institution. The next important wave of constructional activities commenced in the time of Jaṭāvarman Sundara Pāṇḍya (A.D. 1251-1268) and of Kōpperunjinga (A.D. 1243-1279). It is due to the efforts of the former ruler that the *gōpuras* of the eastern, western and southern dispositions saw their completion; of these, the southern gopura is associated with Kōpperunjinga too. In addition, it appears very likely that through Kōpperunjinga's efforts the *mūlasthāna* building came into existence (Chapter IV). The construction of the Subrahmanya shrine (Pāṇḍyanāyakam) had been commenced by Māravarman Sundara Pāṇḍya, and it is possible that Jaṭāvarman Sundara Pandya completed it (FIG. 9). Thus, by the middle of the 13th century all the important structures of the temple complex had attained almost final form.

One point in reference to the two innermost *prākāra* walls deserve critical examination. Every writer on the subject has assumed that the concerned donors built the *prākāra* walls so as to completely enclose the *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā* on all four sides. A careful analysis of the architectural plan of the temple complex in successive periods raises serious doubts whether the contemporary understanding is beyond question. The *cit-sabhā* has retained the south-facing frontage from the very beginning. As Harle (1963) has also observed, the position of *Nandi*, *bali-pīṭha* and the southern *gōpura* are in direct line with the *cit-sabhā*; along this line also lies the *nṛtta-sabhā* (FIGS. 9, 10). The placement of this last structure in a position exactly opposite the *cit-sabhā* and facing it, as a sort of dedication to the Lord of Dance, implies that there should have been no structures obstructing the frontages of either of these *sabhās*. This situation leads to the inference that the two successive *prākāra* walls surrounding the *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā* covered the western and northern sides and perhaps a part of the eastern side also, but not the southern side. There is nothing either in epigraphy or in literature to oppose this inference. Furthermore, an analysis of the inscriptions incised on the two *prākāra* walls upto the 14th century gives the break-up figures as follows:

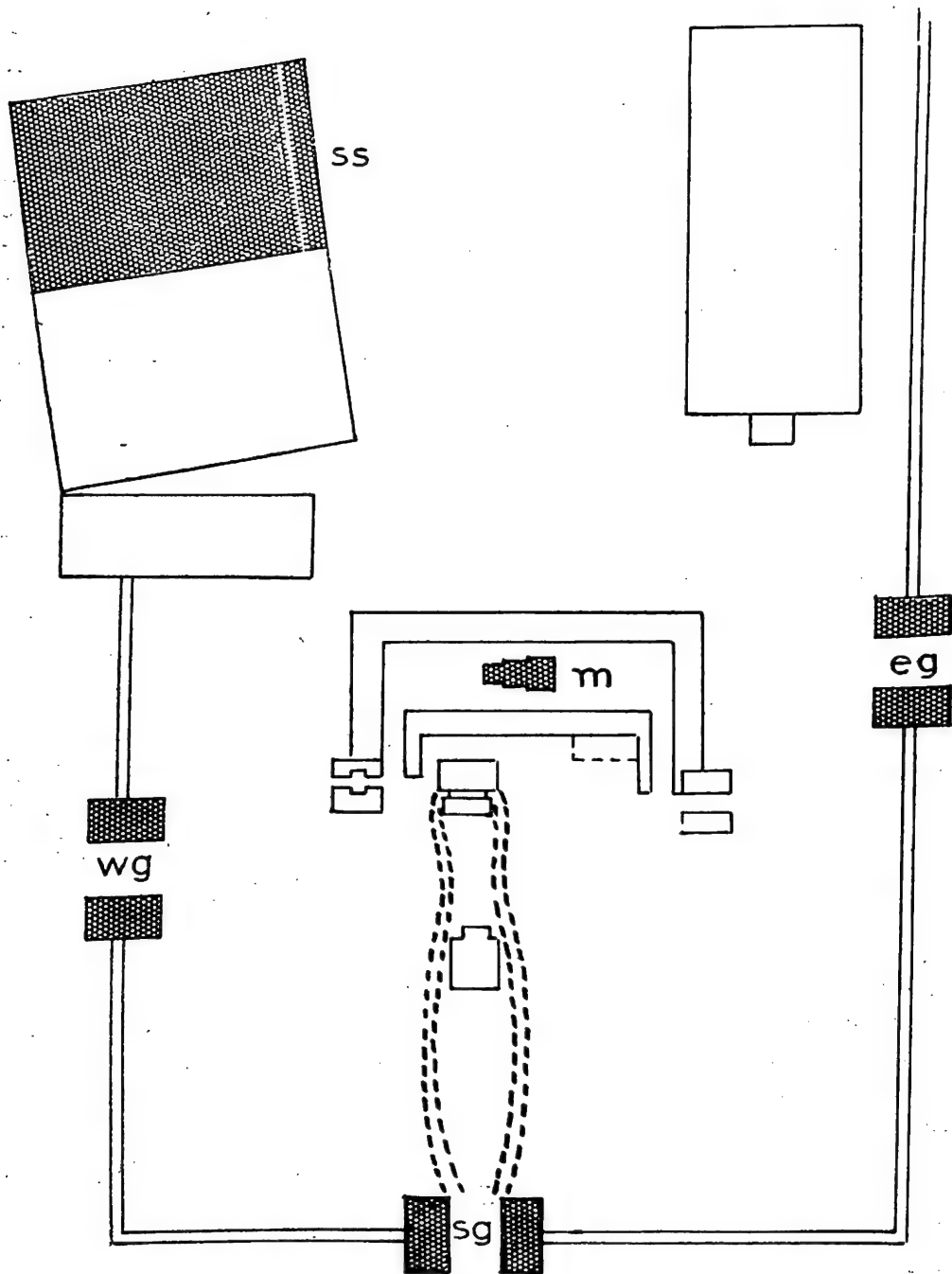


FIG. 9. Structural additions to the Natarāja temple complex (shaded parts) between the regnal years of Kulōttunga III (A.D. 1216-1253) and Rajēndra III (A.D. 1246-1279): e.g.-eastern *gōpura*; m-mulasthāna; sg-southern *gōpura*; ss-Subrahmanya shrine; wg-western *gōpura*.

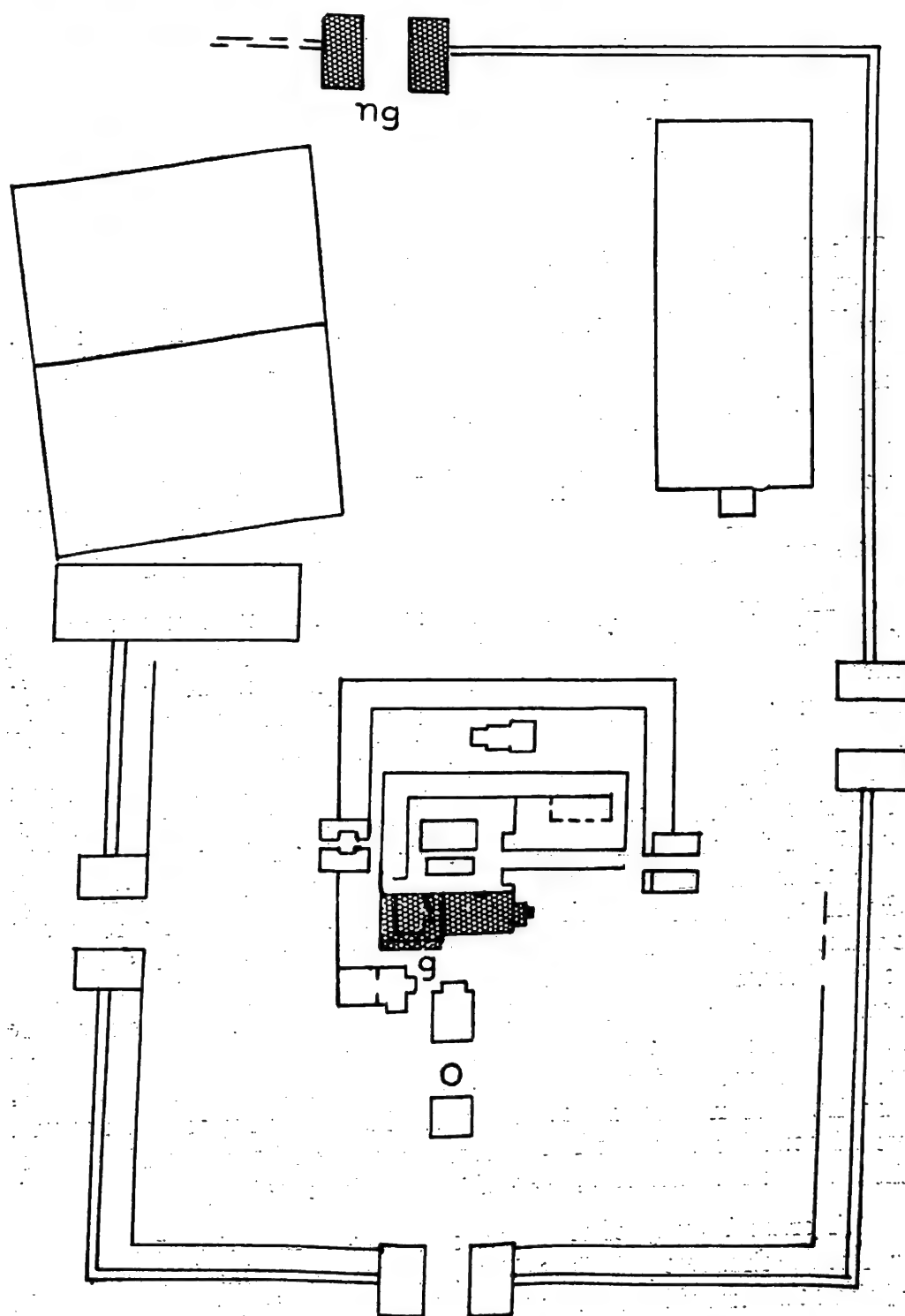


FIG. 10. Structural additions to the Naṭarāja temple complex during the Tuluva dynasty of Vijayanagar (A.D. 16th century); *g*-Govindarāja shrine and accessory structures; *ng*-northern gōpura.

Facets		Inscriptions
North	..	51
West	..	39
East	..	12
South	..	8

This situation again confirms the inference that there could not have been walls running continuously along the eastern and southern sides of the *prākāras*, as otherwise the conspicuously small numbers of inscriptions on these walls cannot be cogently accounted for. It is my opinion that the limitation of the two innermost *prākāras* along the eastern and southern sides was marked by the presence of pillared corridors, interspersed with passages and *maṇṭapas*, thereby not completely cutting off the *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā* from view. It is for this reason that the corresponding sides of the *prākāra* walls are left out in the accompanying ground plans (Figs. 7-9).

This architectural plan of the temple complex continued practically till the time of Acyutarāya of the Vijayanagar dynasty in the first half of the 16th century. His construction of the Gōvindarāja shrine in its present locus caused a more definite, although partial, separation of the first and second *prākāras* along the southern side. The erection of the *maṇṭapa* in front of this shrine by Krishnappa nāyaka of Ginjee completely masked off the *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā*, on the one hand, and the *nṛtta-sabhā*, on the other (FIG. 10). One of the main reasons for selecting the present location of the Gōvindarāja shrine by Acyutarāya could have been the relatively open nature of the southern side or, if there were structures that had to be dismantled, they would have been of a type that could be handled with ease. The resistance showed by the priests of the Naṭarāja temple to the reconstruction of the Gōvindarāja shrine and the associated *mukha-maṇṭapa* by Krishnappa nāyaka could also have been because of the fact that the proposed structures would completely cut off the frontage of the Naṭarāja shrine and at the same time mask the *nṛtta-sabhā* from Naṭarāja's sight (Chapter V).

A critical study of the plan of the existing structures enclosed within the first two *prākāras* (Figs. 11, 12) shows the "discontinuity" of the southern side in contrast to the relative "compactness" of the

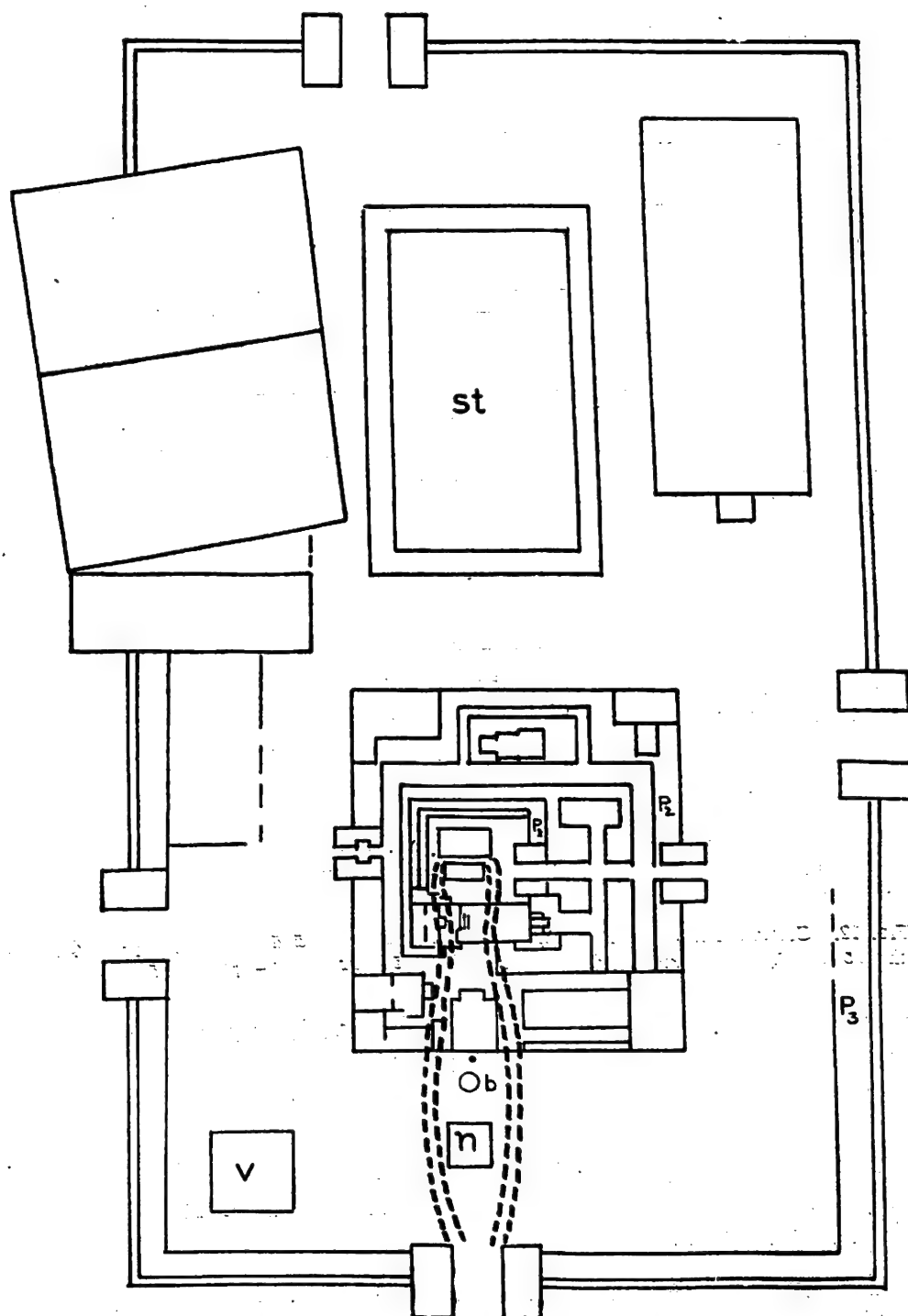


FIG. 11. Ground plan of the Natarāja temple complex (extant): *b*—*bali-pīṭha*; *n*—*nandi mantapa*; *st*—*Sivaganga tirtha*; *v*—*Vinayaka* shrine; *P*₁, *P*₂, *P*₃, respectively—first, second and third *prākāras*.

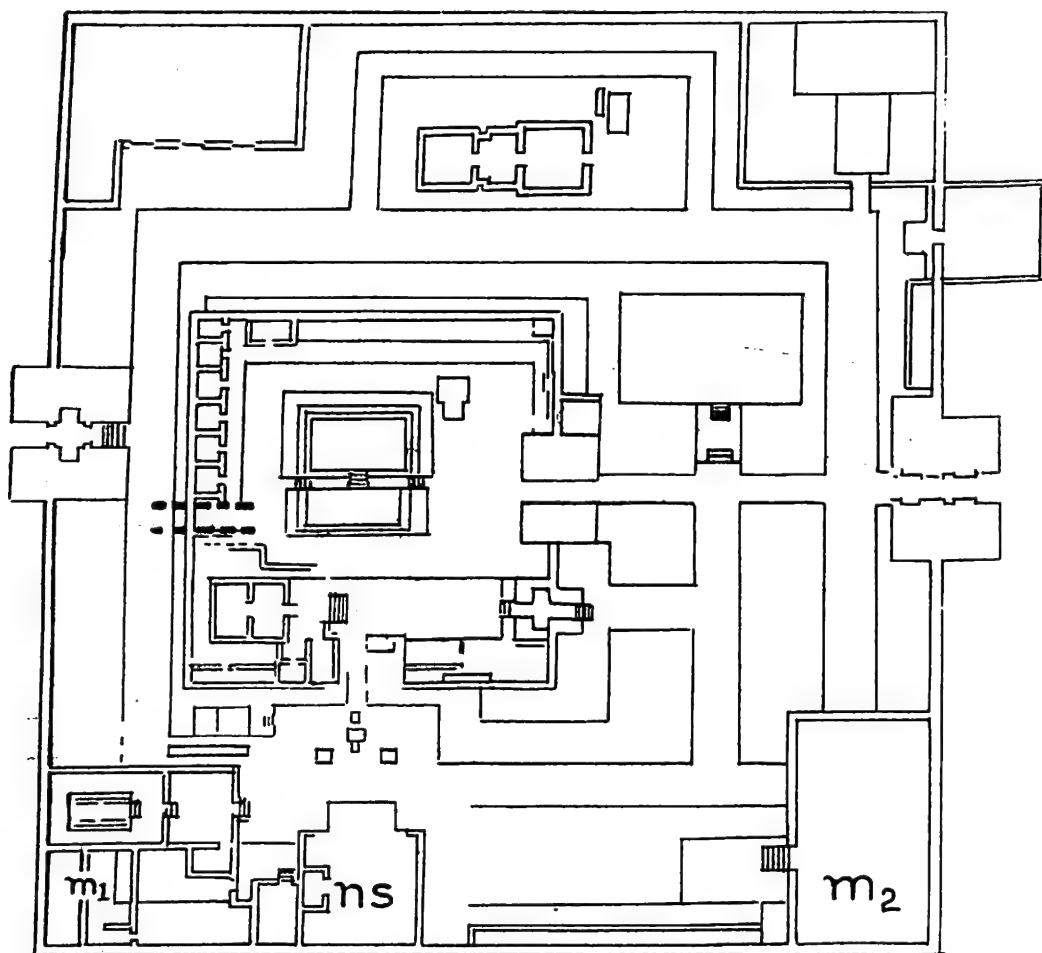


FIG. 12. Ground plan of buildings enclosed within the second *prakāra* (extant): *m*₁ – *maḍappalli* of the Gōvindarāja shrine; *m*₂ – *maḍappalli* of the Natarāja shrine; *ns* – *nṛtta-sabhā*.

remaining sides. The *maḍappalli* on the south east corner and its westward continuation of pillared *maṭapa* appear to be additions made during the post-Krishnappa *nāyaka* period. The platforms, the 'forest of colonades' (as Harle designates) and the paths between the first and second *prakāras* are the benefactions of the Pachaiyappa family and of the houses of the Nāṭṭukoṭṭai Cheṭṭiārs in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The buildings adjoining the eastern wall of the second *prakāra* are: (FIG. 12—l. to r.) accessory structures of the Nācciyār shrine, *maḍappalli* and *maṭapa* (*m*₁), *nṛtta-sabhā* (*ns*), a series of rooms

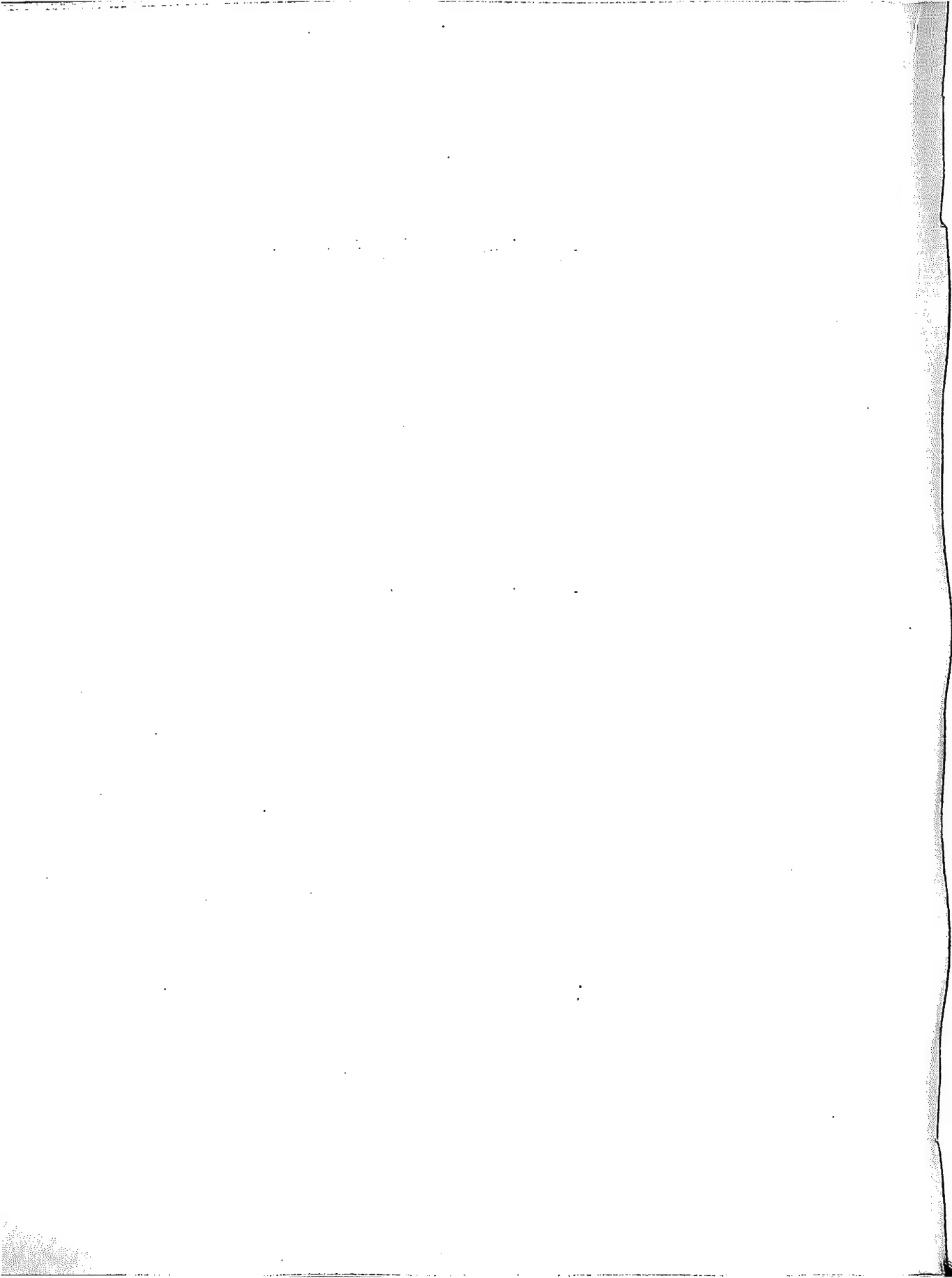
and the *maḍapalli* of the Natarāja shrine (m_2). All these structures with the exception of the *nṛtta-sabhā* are decidedly later additions made sometime during the 17/18th centuries. The important point to be considered in this connection is the presence of a blank part of the wall next to the *nṛtta-sabhā*. In an old photograph (published in Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1956) this part appears with a door with 'obvious European features' (Harle, 1963), but is now closed with masonry work as in the remaining part of the wall. Harle thinks that the width of the breach is "too narrow ever to have contained a *gōpura* similar to the one on the western side of the same *prākāra*".

I feel inclined to rationalize the situation in a different way. Before the Vaiṣṇavite structures were constructed at the southwest corner of the first and second *prākāras*, there must have been a corresponding passage on the western side of the *nṛtta-sabha*. Thus both these passages (heavy lines in FIGS. 9, 11) should have served as direct approaches to the *cit-sabhā*. After entering the temple complex through the southern approach, the visitor would have to pass through the passage under the *gōpura*, circumvent the *Nandi mantapa* and *balipīṭha* and reach the *cit-sabhā* through either left or right side of the *nṛtta-sabhā*. The absence of a *gōpura* along the southern wall need not be a serious objection to this view. The construction of the *nṛtta-sabha* directly facing the *cit-sabhā* would obviate the placement of an entrance with a superstructure in the same position.

As urged above, the eastern and western arms of the two innermost *prākāras* stopped short at the corresponding entrances. This passage on the eastern side is now continuous through both these *prākāras* and directly lead to the *cit-sabhā* (FIGS. 11, 12). On the western side, however, the entrance has remained unaltered in the second *prākāra*, while the corresponding arm of the first *prākāra* is continuous. Thus, for the visitor entering through the western passage of the second *prākāra*, the nearest approach to the *cit-sabhā* lies on the southern side. I suspect, however, that prior to the erection of the Gōvindarāja shrine, there should have been an entrance into the *cit-sabhā* enclosure through the western wall of the innermost (first) *prākāra*, similar to the one on the eastern side.

A close examination of the alignment of stone slabs of this *prākāra* wall suggests that the passage should have been in existence in a position adjacent to the Gōvindarāja shrine (broken heavy lines in FIG. 12).

Part Three: Institution



CHAPTER VII

ON CERTAIN LEGENDS CONNECTED WITH THE TEMPLE

(A) Simhavarman Episode

THE KÖYILPURĀṆAM, which is presumed to be the earliest of the *sthalapurāṇas* of the Naṭarāja temple, devotes one full canto to narrate the episode of Simhavarman. He was the first of the three sons of Gauḍeśa-manu, the other two being Vēdavarman and Sumativarman. As he was suffering from some bodily complaint (*kuṛram*) and as such could not continue on the throne, handed it over to his two younger brothers and started on a pilgrimage. After visiting the Śiva temples at Benares, Bhīmēśvaram, Srīśailam, Kālahasti and Kānchi, came down to Chidambaram. There he was blessed by Vyāghrapāda, bathed in the Śivaganga tank and miraculously got rid of his ailment; and his body acquired a golden hue—hence the name, Hiranyaavarman. It is also stated that Sage Vyāghrapāda anointed Hiranyaavarman as the King of Puliyūr and that this king constructed the temple of Naṭarāja.

Both Kōyilpurāṇam and Cidambaramāhātmyam narrate this incident with little variations. Attempts to strain historical elements from this episode has resulted in highly biased and speculative conclusions. Obviously on the similarity of names, Simhavarman/Hiranyaavarman have been identified with the Pallava rulers (*Ann. Rep. Epigr.*, Part II, para 13), perhaps with Simhavarman II or III (Srinivasachari, 1941), with the father of Nandivarman Pallavamalla (Sathianathaier, 1957), and with Simhavarman II (Somasundaram, 1966; Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946). According to Balasubrahmanyam (1942), Simhavarman was possibly a Cōla on the basis of the word *sembian* in stanza 11, Tiruviḷāśarkam, Kōyilpurāṇam. However, in canto 5 of the same book we learn that Simhavarman was the eldest son of Gauḍeśa-manu of the Gauḍadēśa.

We do not know of any branch of the Pallavas who ruled Gauḍadēśa and there is no historicity for a king of that line having

migrated to Chidambaram and to have established his capital there. Nor are we aware of any Cōla dynasty which ruled the Gaudadēśa. The identification of Simhavarman/Hiranyavarman with the father of Nandivarman Pallavamalla is wholly untenable firstly because this king's father never lived in India (see Mahalingam, 1969) and secondly, because the genealogy of Simhavarman as given in the Kōyil-purāṇam cannot be tallied with that of Nandivarman Pallavamalla.

The hypothetical excursions do not stop with the identification of the concerned king. They also involve the time of origin of the Naṭarāja temple. While according to several authors it was built in the time of the Pallavas, Balasubrahmanyam (1942) thinks that the lower limit is provided by the "hymns of Sambandar and Appar, who were contemporaries of the Pallava Mahendravarman I of the 7th century A.D. But the temple should have come into existence at least two or three centuries earlier".*

Purāṇas in general pose a major problem for a scientific historian. That some incidents in these texts may possess the 'ghost' of a historical person or event cannot always be overlooked. But the difficulty arises in judiciously sifting the historical element. After a critical study of Cidambaramāhātmyam in which the Hiranyavarman episode is narrated, Kulke (1970) writes: "Considering some archaeological facts and extremely surprising parallels between the legendary life of Hiranyavarman and the 'vita' of Kulōttunga I (1070-1118), I realized that several aspects of this Cōla king's life were the basis of the Hiranyavarman legend. . . .in the legendary personality of Hiranyavarman we have to see the historical king Kulōttunga I." As far as I can see there is nothing against accepting this inference.

(B) The Story of Patanjali

The *sthalapurāṇas* associate the name of a Patanjali with the dance of Naṭarāja and His institution at Chidambaram. It is said that Patanjali is a reincarnation of *ādiśeṣa*. Almost all writers have

* It must be emphasized here that the date of the above *nayanmars* as belonging to the 7th century A.D. has to be abandoned. Their age has been fixed as the 10th century A.D. For details, see Swamy, B. G. L., 1975, "The Date of the *Tevaram* Trio", *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures*, Madras, January-June 1975, pp. 119-179.

offered suggestions whether he could be the Patanjali of the Mahābhāṣya or of the Yōgasūtra. To Balasubrahmanyam (1942) it is immaterial whether he was either of the two, but Chidambaram "took pride in associating with it the name of a great scholar". Sathianathaier (1957) appears to think that the grammatical studies that are related with the Tondaimaṇḍalam from the 11th century onwards could be the "basis of the etiological legend connecting Patanjali with the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram."

There is no warrant to identify the Patanjali of Chidambaram with either of the two well-known Patanjalis. It is said that the method of worship conducted in the Naṭarāja shrine follows the prescriptions laid down in a text known as "Naṭarāja nitya pūjā sūtram" written by Patanjali (Kuncitapādāṅghristavam) and "Pūjā-pātanjalām" (Ramalingam, 1963). It is not clear whether these two are the same. There is also a set of 10 verses under the name Naṭeśāṣṭakam and an aṣṭōttara śātānāmāvali, both attributed to the authorship of Patanjali (Somasetu Diksitar, 1957). That this Patanjali of Chidambaram had attained fame in his own right is clear from his having stabilized the codes of worship for Naṭarāja. For these reasons it is certain that the Patanjali connected with Chidambaram was quite distinct from his namesake in reference to Mahābhāṣya or Yōgasūtra.

There is an *advaitic* text—which Abhinavagupta calls 'ādhāra-kārikas'—attributed to the authorship of Ādiśeṣa otherwise known as Patanjali, Śeṣamuni and Anantanātha. Abhinavagupta's "Paramārthasāra" is an adaptation of this text (Devasthali, 1955; Mahadevan, 1955). It is very likely that this Patanjali's 'ādhāra-kārikas' could have been a legacy of the families of scholars who settled down at Perumbarrappuliyūr. Would not these facts throw light on the identity of Patanjali associated with the Naṭarāja cult? The legendary account of a Patanjali having come down to Chidambaram may only mean that the 'ādhāra-kārikas' bearing the formal name Paramārthasāra, or, in other words, the followers of these *kārikas* came and settled down at Perumbarrappuliyūr, or, simply that the thoughts contained in the text radiated southwards to Chidambaram. Kulke (1970) also feels that the Naṭarāja cult is unmistakably and intimately associated with the Patanjali legend as contained in Cidambaramāhātmyam and other *sthalapurāṇas*.

In this connection I am tempted to refer to a verse from the inscription of Naralōkavīra (Appendix A) (*SITI*, III, ii, Nos. 1271, 1272, 1273):

bhaṭṭācārya itiśrutam bhuviśivā
mūrtim guhōyām vasan
samvādam khila vēda bāhya samaya
nāthasya cakrēpurā

tanmūrtim vinivēda lōkaparamā
nandapradam pāvanīm
sōyam brahmakulōdvahō
vihitavān tasmin śatamagraṇih

The language of the stanza appears to be somewhat defective and Subramanian (1957) has suggested some alternative readings providing a prose rendering. I would, however, understand the purport as follows: The world-renowned Bhaṭṭācārya had in his heart the auspicious image of Śiva (Naṭarāja); he was discoursing to the leaders of non-Vēdic cults. His (Bhaṭṭācārya's) image, which gave immense joy to the world, was installed by Naralōkavīra, who was of Brāhmaṇa descent.

In spite of the vagaries of the language, one point emerges out clearly—that the Bhaṭṭācārya referred to must have enjoyed great reputation and respect. If the words “guhōyām vasan”, the exact meaning of which cannot be directly incorporated into the context, is substituted by the words “guhāyām vasan”, then it means that the Bhaṭṭācārya resided in the *guhā*, that is, the concealed chamber in the *tilla*, which fact would speak of his *yōgic* practices.

Could this person be one of the chief disciples or one in the lineage of the author of the original (‘ādhārakārīka’) Paramārthasāra, which Abhinavagupta adapted into his text of the same name? Is it not possible that the Bhaṭṭācārya (=teacher of *darsana*; that is, of a philosophical system) was propagating the tenets of the *Pratyabhijnā* system of philosophy, which, in the earlier stages of exposition, was purely non-Vēdic (Kaul, 1925)? Because of his eminence and scholarship in this *darsana* and also perhaps of his having belonged to the lineage of the author of the original Pāramārthasāra, is it not probable that he was also known as Patanjali?

There is also a vague suggestion that the preceptors of the Naṭarāja-sthāna or the *Pratyabhijnā* monastery could have been honorifically designated as Patanjali for the same reason. The image of a Patanjali-dēva donated by Pancavan mahadevi, one of the queens of Rājarāja I, could possibly represent another member of this lineage. And the Patanjali mentioned by Kandarāditya could be yet another preceptor. Thus the name Patanjali appears to be the designation for the head of the *pītha* (monastic order) perhaps initiated by or commencing from the author of the original Pāramārthasāra.

A record of Vīra Pāṇḍya (115 of 1939/40, A.D. 1301) states that there was a Patanjali mahāmuni-dēvan who resided in Melaichchēri at Perumbarrappuliyūr. As shown in Chapter IX there is categorical evidence to conclude that he belonged to the Bhikṣā maṭha of the Gōlaki *dharma* (a dualistic school of Śaivism, which was opposed to the non-dualistic *Pratyabhijnā darśana*).

(C) Aditya I and Guilding of Tillai

According to the available epigraphic sources, Parāntaka I was the first to have guilded the *cit-ambaram* (*EI*, 22, No. 34, verse 17; *SII*, III, No. 205, verse 53). This act is also corroborated in literature:

- (1) venkōl vēndan tennanadum ilamum kondatiṟṟa cenkōr
cōlan kolivendan śēmbian ponnaninda
angol valaiyar padiyadum anitillaiambalam
—9th tirumuṟai; kōyirpadikam, verse 8
- (2) kotilat teral kunikkum tirumanran
kadalar ponveynda kavalarum
—Vikramacōlan ulā, lines 31, 32

However, on the basis of a verse occurring in Nambi-andar-nambi's Tiruttonḍar tiruvandādi (*cingatturuvanaic-ceṟṟavan cirram-balamukundukonkir kanakam aninda ādittan*—verse 65), arguments have been put forward to identify this Āditya with Āditya I and to make Nambi-andar-nambi a contemporary of this king (Vellai-varanan, 1962). Whether Āditya I actually conquered the Kongudēśa is a point about which some degree of uncertainty hangs over.

Although the chronicle, Kongudēśa-rājākkal, refers to Vijayādhirāja's son Ādityavarmarāja's conquest of the Kongu country, the very late period of its composition (17th century) raises serious doubts as to its trustworthiness as an historical document. Arokiaswami (1956) has interpreted a couple of epigraphs as corroborating the literary information. Yet the evidence on hand is not sufficient to arrive at a categorical conclusion. In so far as Nambi-āṇḍār-nambi's statement is concerned, it may be noted that there is a state of quandary in reference to his date. Although the Annamalai school of scholars strongly feel about their proposed date of this person, the sources on which they have drawn the inference lend themselves to alternative interpretations (Subramania Aiyer, 1959). There is also a possibility that Āditya mentioned by Nambi-āṇḍār-nambi could be Gaṇḍarāditya.

In spite of the absence of clinching evidence to connect Āditya I with the guilding of *cit-ambaram* if one is still inclined to accept the opinion of the Aṇṇāmalai school, it is clear that the existence of this structure cannot be pushed backwards to the regnal years of this king (A.D. 871-907).

(D) Viśvakarma and Tillai

While historians are inclined to believe the existence of the *cit-ambaram* from the time of the "Pallava" king "Hiraṇyavarman" or even from that of an earlier king of this dynasty, the traditional legends assert that it was actually planned and constructed by Viśvakarma himself. That the historians' opinions are untenable is shown above (section A). The traditionalists' account may be ignored on the very face of it. But it is pertinent to inquire whether there could have been any background for the legend.

We hear of Viśvakarma as the architect of the *cit-ambaram* in Cidambaramāhātmyam (canto 15, verses 38, 39; canto 18, verses 42-50). It is interesting to note that when a dispute arose among the *dikṣitars* on the execution some repairs to the temple, the dissenting group strongly objected to such a move in reference to the *cit-ambaram* on the ground that humans have no authority to disturb the edifices of this structure as they had been originally built "by divine agency", that "they should not be desecrated by repair, and

that such desecration would materially lower the prestige of the institution for its sacred character in public estimations" (*Indian Law Rep.*, V, pp. 73-85). In what light the Court viewed this 'evidence' is not clear. To an outsider, however, adducing such a reason for preventing the repairs appears to represent an extreme degree of cussedness on the part of the dissenters. Because, there are documents to prove that the *cit-sabhā* in earlier times had been renovated and repaired occasionally. To mention one such instance, Cittambalamuni had renovated the Naṭarāja-sthāna and performed *kumbhābhiṣeka* during the time of the Marattah ruler of Tanjore, Śambhōji, in A.D. 1688 (c.p. 20, 23 of 1946/7). It should also be mentioned that the act of gilding the roof of the *cit-āmbaram* by the rulers of the Cōla and Pāṇḍya dynasties should have caused at least temporary disturbance to the architecture of the *cit-sabhā*.

Whether the dissenters were ethically correct in adducing this pretext in an attempt to win their case is another matter. To me it appears that the pretext itself is *pregnant* with significance. I am inclined to put forth that the real nature of the concealed basement chamber at the back of the Naṭarāja-sthāna (Chapter III) would be exposed to the public should repair work be undertaken. This has been carefully guarded as a secret for a couple of centuries from the time of its being walled off (Chapter X) and its exposure would certainly affect the interests of the dīkṣitars *adversely*.

(E) Kālī and Naṭarāja

There is a popular legend that in a challenge that ensued between Kālī and Śiva concerning their respective ability in the art of dance, the latter outwitted the former by his skill and inventiveness, and as a result of this, Kālī had to vacate her abode at Tillai and move away to the outskirts of Perumbarappuliyūr. In South Indian tradition Kālī appears as an indigenous cult-deity possessing no affiliation to Śiva. The temples dedicated to her are generally located on the outskirts of tenements. She is looked upon with fear as the diseases of men and animals are believed to be inflicted by her.

The association of Naṭarāja of Chidambaram with Kālī remains unexplainable without an understanding of the *krama* texts of the *Pratyabhijnā* school of thought. The *krama* doctrine conceives that

liberation comes through successive stages, in order. *Kālīnaya* is another name for the *krama* system, because this deity is conceived as the Absolute principle (*paramatattva*). She too exhibits her pentad functions—*kṣēpa*, *jñāna*, *prasamkhyāna*, *gati* and *nāda*. It may be noted that these acts are in no way different from the pentad acts of Śiva (Chapter XI). In this system Kālī takes the place of the *dēvi* (consort) of Śiva. Furthermore, just as Śiva projects his dance of the pentad functions from within to the outside, so also does Kālī—“*svātmanō bhēdānām kṣēpah*”. According to Baladev Upadhyaya (1969), such concepts of Kālī are elements of the *śakti-advaita* philosophy that became interwoven into the *Pratyabhijnā darsana*. Abhinavagupta's verse expresses the gist of the esoteric significance of Kālī:

prakāśāhkyā samvit kramavirahitā śūnyapadāto
 bahirlīnatyantam prasarati samācchādakatayā
 tatōpyantassārē galitarabhasādākramataya
 mahākālī sēyam mamakalayatam kalāmakhilam

—(Krama Stōtra, verse 26)

CHAPTER VIII

“CHIDAMBARA RAHASYA”

IN MODERN PARLANCE the institution of ‘rahasya’ in the Naṭārāja temple is referred to in a lighter vein to mean that there is actually nothing secret about it. However, an analysis of historical and cultural background indicates a rather revealing situation.

At the outset it must be recalled that one of the alternative names for the *Pratyabhijnā* system is *rahasya sampradāya* and that this was a designation that had come into vogue in Kashmir itself. Kṣēma-rāja’s commentary on Vasugupta’s Spanda Kārika calls the teaching ‘secret’ (commentary on Kārika I). The same author closes his Śiva-sūtravimarśinī with the words, “Good people in order to shake off *samsāra* should enjoy this Śivasūtravimarśinī which is filled with nectar oozing from the explanation of the Secrets of Śiva”. Again, the author advises: “carefully think over the Śivasūtra full of Secrets” (P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar’s translation; see also Chapter IX). A *tilla*, it may be noted, admirably served the purpose of a *yōga-sthāna*. There is some epigraphic evidence to posit that the *tilla* at Perumbaṛraṇṇappuliyūr was used by the followers of the Naṭārāja cult for meditation and *yōgic* practices (Chapter VII).

Not only for the practice of *yōga* but also for attaining the final *samādhi* a cave or some other isolated place unseen by others was necessary according to the *Pratyabhijnā* precepts, as in many other cults that prescribe *yōgic* practices. This is illustrated by a legend that has grown around Abhinavagupta. “After finishing his work, as he thought, (he) walked into the Bhairava cave and was never seen again” (Pandey, 1935). Such legends are not wanting in reference to the *tilla* at Chidambaram. Nanda, “Māṇikkavācaka”, and even the historically known Appayya Dīkṣita are said to have entered the *cit-ambaram* never to return. There is also a hearsay that “Tirumular” entered into the final *samādhi* here. The basis of such legends could obviously be that there was a ‘secret’ chamber within the *tilla* where *yōgis* entered into eternal *samādhi*.

The empty space, now walled off, behind the present Naṭarāja-sthāna and leading into the subjacent chamber (Chapter III) should have served as the *samādhi-sthāna* for those who practised *yōga* discipline. The main entrance into the *tilla* exposed to the public view must have remained open until comparatively recent times. It is difficult to assess when exactly the entrance was walled off and the present locus of the icon of Naṭarāja instituted. It is important to recall here that the '*rahasya*' panel that lies adjacent to the Naṭarāja-pīṭha is considered to be coordinate in importance and significance to the image of Naṭarāja itself; that these two are inseparable is suggested by the use of the term *praṇava-pīṭha* to the common platform on which they stand (Somasekhara Diksitar, 1967). It is said that "Naṭarāja represents the *sarūpa* while the '*rahasya*' is *arūpa* and the *sphatika-linga* (Candramaulīśvara) is *rūpārūpa* aspects of Śiva" and are respectively referred to as "sakalasvarūpa, niṣkala-svarūpa and sakala-niṣkalasvarūpa" (Ramalingam, 1963).

Whether the '*rahasya*' institution had been considered in the past in the same light as at present and whether a locus for its adoration adjacent to the Naṭarāja icon or anywhere else had been in existence in those times are doubtful. There is no mention of '*rahasya*' in older literature either on Naṭarāja or on Chidambaram. However, there appears to have been an unmistakable association of a *yōgic* type of *sādhana* known by the name *dahara-vidyā* or *daharōpāsana* with the Naṭarāja cult. "Under this method, God is meditated upon by the devotee in the ethereal space situated in the middle of his 'heart' (*dahara*)." "By the word 'heart' is not meant the physiological organ, but the centre of the body imagined as a hollow and filled with *ākāśa*. *Ākāśa* is sound conceived not as sensation within the brain, but as an objective entity. Such an *ākāśa* fills the inside of the body. In its centre, which is the heart (the '*buddhi guhā*', "there is a dot of light", Śivasūtravimarśinī, see commentary on the *sūtra*:" Vidyā Śarīra-sattā mantra-rahasyam"). One of the methods of *daharōpāsana* is to meditate on Lord of '*panca-kṛtya* in the lotus-shaped heart of the *Virāṭpuruṣa* (*Puṇḍarīka*). The plan of the Naṭarāja temple is compared to the body of the *Virāṭpuruṣa*, the *cit-sabhā* being His heart, and *mahāmāya* His middle part facing the south, etc. (Tilvavanamāhātmyam).

The origin of *daharōpāsana* is traced to the thoughts in certain *upaniṣads* as mentioned above. There are a number of imageries involving secrecy in the method. As in all *yōgic* practices, this method also requires a ‘secret’ place; the *daharākāśa* or *hrdayā-kāśa*, again, has a shade of the same imagery in that it cannot be *seen* from outside (see Paramaśivēndra Sarasvati’s *Daharavidyāprakāśikā*).

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In A.D. 1749 Captain Cope took shelter in the Naṭarāja temple, Chidambaram. In A.D. 1753 the French troops not only occupied the temple but converted it into a military base. They strengthened the outer walls, built bastions, batteries and embrasures. The temple was in their possession until 1760 when it was freed by the English. Whether the British troops handed it over to its owners or continued to occupy it for a few more years is not clear. However, “In the course of the II Mysore War (1780-1784) when Sir Eyre Coote marched southward from Cuddalore in June 1781, preparatory to engaging Hyder Ali, he attacked Chidambaram whose fortified Pagoda had been for some time under the occupation of the enemy” (Srinivasachari, 1941). This statement obviously means that Hyder’s troops should have taken possession of the temple from the British sometime prior to A.D. 1780. Thus, but for a short break of a few years between 1750 and 1780, the working of the temple may be expected to have ceased.

The Mackenzie Manuscripts, however, state that from “1608 down to 1678, or 70 years, during the rule of the Nabob of Cuddappah, all things at this place (the Naṭarāja temple) were involved in trouble by the Mahomedons; and there was no public exercise of this place, of the Saiva religion”.

Thus there appear to be two periods of interlude in the history of the Naṭarāja temple, one in the 17th and the other in the 18th centuries. Four copper plate inscriptions discovered at the Tyāgarājasvāmi temple, Tiruvārūr (20-23 of 1946/7), state that a person who is designated as Cittambala yōgi or Cittambala muni renovated the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram, made gifts and performed *kumbhābhiṣēkam* at the instance of Gōpala-dādāji, an officer of the king. One of these inscriptions is dated in the śaka year 1611

(A.D. 1688) and the same could be the date of the remaining copper plates as well, as all these refer to one and the same event. Of these, c.p. 21 states that the deity commenced His dance in the *sabhā* in the year *kṣaya*. This event more or less coincides with the terminal years of the interregnum spoken of by the Mackenzie Manuscripts. A Samskr̥t *ślōka* incised on the 1000-pillared *mantapa* at the Naṭarāja temple states that Naṭarāja returned to Chidambaram from Tiruvārūr to recommence His dance in the Śaka year 1695 (A.D. 1773), which date approximates the tail-end of the chronologically second period of intermission. This part of the 18th century was also the period when extensive renovations and repairs to the temple were undertaken by the house of Pachaiyappa Mudaliyār.

Whether there were two periods of intermission, one in the 17th and the other in the 18th centuries as indicated by the data presented above, is a matter that should be left open for future investigations.

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The political disturbances during the 17th and 18th centuries must have left their impact on the religious life of the owner-priests of the Naṭarāja temple. The duration of the intermissions caused a change of venue for the life of the priests who had to move over to Tiruvārūr. Although they appear to have taken their personal deity of worship along with them, it is doubtful if the conditions in the new environment permitted the conduct of rituals in the same full gamut and their *yōgic* meditation with the same rigour as in the original habitat. Thus it is likely that certain aspects of their personal practices were obliged to be given up as also some of the ceremonies and festivals of public nature. *Yōgic* practices obviously could not be continued for want of *tilla*-like abode with a concealed chamber, or possibly such of those as were adepts in its practice would have met with natural death without leaving the legacy. I suspect, therefore, that by the time the Naṭarāja image was re-installed in its original habitat, the institution had become bereft of one of its vital aspects and therefore the basement chamber of the *tilla* had no further use. At the end of each intermission we hear of extensive repairs and renovations for the temple. Could it be

that the entrance to the basement chamber was walled off during one of these junctures, and the *lost* aspect of the cult represented by a symbol called '*rahasya*' on a portion of this wall? The thus installed '*rahasya*', however, appears to be a confused amalgam of diverse 'secret' contexts mentioned earlier. It may be recalled that one such context conceives *daharākāśa* (generally translated as 'space or ether'). Is it not probable that an extended, but rather involving, concept of an '*ākāśa linga*' was evolved later to obscure the real significance of the basement chamber? The rituals that are being conducted now to the '*rahasya*' panel in the name of '*daharōpāsana*' has nothing to do with the *yōgic sādhana* with which the name was associated to begin with and have only beclouded the real significance.

Along with these innovations, other minor parts and structural units of the *cit-sabhā* were also given esoteric significances in a somewhat clumsy and muddled manner. Amongst these, the 'Lotus of the Heart', '*nāḍi*', '*prāṇāyāma*', '*mahāmāya*' etc., possess purely *yōgic* connotations, which, however, suggest that in the past the *tilla* was essentially *yōga-sthāna*. Sthalapurāṇas like *Tilvavanamāhātmyam*, *Puṇḍarīkapuramāhātmyam* and *Chidambaramāhātmyam* expound these aspects.

CHAPTER IX

INSTITUTIONS OF OTHER RELIGIONS AT PERUMBARRAPPULIYŪR

IN ADDITION TO THE INSTITUTION of Naṭarāja, there were other Śaivite denominations residing at Perumbarrappuliyūr from the beginning of the Cōla dynasty in the 9th century. According to Balasubrahmanyam (1966) the Anantīśvaram temple belongs to the time of Vijayālaya and Parāntaka I. From the time of these kings until the regnal years of Rājarāja I, a *purāṇic* type of Pāśupata cult was dominating in the Tamil country, and as mentioned elsewhere (Chapter X), the Gōlaki school of Śaivism began to strike roots from the 11th century.

Perumbarrappuliyūr and environs were the earliest centres for the establishment of monasteries belonging to the Gōlaki school of Śaivism. As early as A.D. 1041, in the reign of Rājēndra I, we hear of a monastery (Mēlaichchēri) belonging to the Lakṣādhyāyī lineage of this school at this place; it is interesting to note that the preceptor's name was Kanakasabhāpati....dēśikar, which shows that even during this early period, the Gōlaki school had accepted Naṭarāja as *their* deity (88 of 1946/7). There was also another lineage of the Gōlaki school known as Kīlaimaḍasantāna situated at Tiruvārūr. A record of Rājanārāyaṇa Śambuvarāya (12th century) states that a preceptor by name Vāgīśvaradēva of this lineage was residing at Perumbarrappuliyūr (483 of 1920). Yet another record of the same chief from Ādipurīśvara temple, Tiruvorriyūr, near Madras, confirms the existence of a Gōlaki institution (*Bhikṣā maṭha*) at Perumbarrappuliyūr (212 of 1912). Here again we see their continued overtures to absorb Naṭarāja as a member of their pantheon. Rāvaḷar Kailāsadēvar, a preceptor of the Vaḍakkīl *maṭha* of the Gōlaki school at Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, bought lands at Perumbarrappuliyūr for growing flowers therein for use in the Naṭarāja temple; the grant was approved by the Kāḍava chief, Kōpperunjinga (11 of 1935/6, A.D. 1248; 106 of 1934/5, A.D. 1254). In the 14th

century, the Mēlaiccēri *maṭha* referred to above (88 of 1946/7) continued to function. Provision was made for feeding the resident *tapasvins* by the people of Alividaṅgiparru (115 of 1939/40, A.D. 1301). There was another Gōlaki (*Bhikṣā*) institution by name Tiruvellaikāvalan tirumaḍam functioning at the place under the headship of a preceptor, Tiruppuṇavāśal Mudaliyār (399 of 1954/5, A.D. 1484). The continuous and close association of the Gōlaki school of Śaivism with Perumbarrappuliyūr and the institution of Naṭarāja therein through a couple of centuries should have contributed a considerable measure of impact towards the imposition of syncretic factors on the Naṭarāja cult (Chapter X).

In the 13th century we see another sect of Śaivites having influence in Chidambaram. The concerned persons—obviously religious leaders—hailed from Dakṣiṇa Rādhā country. Sōmanāthadēva alias Uḍaiyār Svāmidēvar made over a land gift, which he had received earlier from the *mūlaparuṣaiyār* of Perumbarrappuliyūr, for the cultivation of a flower garden for use of the Naṭarāja temple (9 of 1935/6, A.D. 1219). Another person by name Īśvara-śiva gave lands for a similar purpose (105 of 1934/5, A.D. 1262). It is not possible to ascertain their specific creed of Śaivism. The contents of the inscription suggest that they must have migrated to the Tamil country perhaps a century earlier.

In addition to the religious preceptors and their institutions as mentioned above, there were a number of *maṭhas* situated at Perumbarrappuliyūr. In the time of Kulōttunga I there was a feeding house called Tillaivālandanan *maṭha*. A grant executed in the reign of this king records an endowment for feeding the devotees in this institution. In view of the benefactions bestowed by this king towards the institution of Naṭarāja, it is likely that the said *maṭha* was built by him as an expression of his respect and admiration of the “andaṇars of the tilla”. There was also a *maṭha* at Ulagamudaiya caturvēdimangalam, a hamlet of Perumbarrappuliyūr (278 of 1913, A.D. 1123). An unnamed monastery (*guhāi*) wherein *tapasvins* resided was the recipient of some endowment towards its maintenance (3 of 1935/6, A.D. 1185). In the 16th regnal year of Rājarāja III (A.D. 1233) there was a feeding institution by name Aṟapperuncelviccālāi. It is said that *ātulars*—destitutes or disabled persons

(*SITI*, I, No. 20)—received rice, firewood, etc., from this house. We also hear of Tirunāvukkarasudēvan *maṭha* (305 of 1958/9, A.D. 1234), Sāvitrī *maṭha* (309 of 1958/9, probably 14th century), a *maṭha* built by a native of Tārāmaṅgalam (21 of 1900, Acyutadēvarāya's period) and Periyadēvanāyanār *maṭha* (107 of 1946/7, 16th century). All these appear to have been involved essentially in affording food and shelter to the needy.

That such a religious environment continues to pervade at Chidambaram in the present day as well speaks of the continuously increasing glory of Naṭarāja. The existing monasteries over there belong to diverse orders of Śaivite sects, some of them having affiliation with their respective chief institutions outside the town of Chidambaram (Somasundaram, 1963). Most of these appear to be centres for dissemination of knowledge pertaining to their respective faiths. Irrespective of their individual sectarian following, they look upon Lord Naṭarāja as their own god, although with an adopted label. It is strange that even the Vīraśaiva sect, which according to tradition is not expected to take cognizance of iconic forms of worship, has begun to interpret some *vacanas* of their preceptors, Basavēśvara and Akkamahādēvi, in terms of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* form of Naṭarāja (Basavaraju, 1963).

There have been unmistakable evidence of the Vēdic religion having had its sporadic but even distribution throughout the Tamil country as elsewhere in South India from the 7th century A.D. The hymns of both the Śaivite and the Vaiṣṇavite devotees refer to the Brāhmanical rites, the smoke emanating from the sacrificial fire-pits, and the sound of the Vēdic chants. The considerable number of *Caturvēdimangalams* founded and added on to Perumbaṛraṇṇappuliyūr (Chapter I) is clearly indicative of the Vēdic atmosphere that pervaded in Chidambaram.

It is difficult to ascertain if the Naṭarāja cult left any impact at all on the followers of the Vēdic religion. On the other hand, there are some indications that the Tillaites adopted certain elements from the Vēdic lore. It is well to remember that *purāṇic* themes had by then become interwoven with the local brand of Śaivism—for example, that Lord Śiva was the source of both Āgamas and Vēdas, that he loved to listen to the chanting of the Vēdas, etc. The *śata-*

rūdrīya part of the Vēdic lore appears to have been specially preferred not only by the contemporary Śaivites but also by the devout writers of *purāṇic* literature. A study of the later *stōtras* concerning the Lord of Dance at Chidambaram shows the clear interlacing of such *purāṇic* elements with the general praises and achievements of Śiva.

It is very probable that the Tillaites could have drawn these Vēdic elements from the local Śaivites or from the Brāhmaṇas. The use of certain Vēdic *mantras* in connection with the public worship of Naṭarāja and of the Candramaulīśvara *linga* are obviously Vēdic infiltrations (Chapter X).

CHAPTER X

ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE NAṬARĀJA TEMPLE

I

REPEATED ATTENTION IS DRAWN to the way in which the affairs of the temple of Naṭarāja are being managed and this feature is cited as an administrative set-up that is unique (Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946; Somasundaram, 1963). The earliest epigraphic reference to an administrative committee that was in charge of the affairs of this temple occurs in the year A.D. 1116 (117 of 1888); the committee was constituted of the following members: 1. Tonḍaimān; 2. Tiruvaiyāruḍaiyān; 3. Madurāntaka Brahmādirāyan; 4. Tillaiambala Pallavarāyan; 5. those involved in *śrīkāryam*; 6. those involved in *kōyil nāyakam*; and 7. those involved in *tirumāligaikkūru*. Of these, Nos. 1-4 appear to represent the government and Nos. 5-7 the owner priests who were supervising the different internal functions of the institution. Of the first four, it is likely that Tonḍaimān stands for Karunakara Tonḍaimān and Madurāntaka Brahmārāyan for Jnānamūrti Paṇḍita, both of whom were officers under the king.

During the time of Kulōttunga III also there was a similar committee, the constitution of which was as follows: 1. Tennavan Brahmārāyan; 2. Jayatunga Pallavarāyan; 3. Tillaiambala Pallavarāyan; 4. those involved in *māhēśvara kaṅkāṇi*; 5. those involved in *śrīkāryām*; 6. those involved in *sāmudāyam*; 7. those involved in *kōyil nāyakam*; 8. those involved in *tiru-māligaikkūru*; and 9. *kaṇakkar*. Here again the first three obviously refer to the officers of the king, although they cannot be identified with specific individuals. A perusal of the inscriptions from the time of Kulōttunga I to that of Vikrama Pāṇḍya (14th century) through Kōpperunjinga (13th century) indicates the rather stereotyped pattern of constitution of the managing committee—a combination of governmental representatives who were holding other offices and owner priests of the temple.

The number of the king's officers on the committee varied from three to eight during various periods from the 13th to 14th century. The largest number is recorded in an epigraph of Kulaśēkhara Pāṇḍya (124 of 1888; *SII*, IV, No. 229). The names given are: Tennavan Brahmarāyan, Kulaśēkhara Brahmarāyan, Vikramacōla Brahmarāyan, Vikrama Pāṇḍya Brahmarāyan, Jayatunga Pallavarāyan, Ēṇādirāyan and Tillaiambala Pallavarāyan. Some of these names, e.g., Tennavan Brahmarāyan and Tillaiambala Pallavarāyan, occur repeatedly in inscriptions ranging from the time of Kulōtunga III to that of Vikrama Pāṇḍya (14th century). Thus these names appear to be indicative of the offices that the individuals were holding. The remaining part of the committee was a more homogeneous group consisting of persons involved in the internal management of the temple.

A survey of epigraphic literature of the medieval Tamil country indicates that the management of many temples were within the control of such committees and that the Naṭarāja institution was no exception. As early as the time of Rājarāja I (about A.D. 1000), the affairs of the Vēdāranyēśvara temple, Vēdārayanam, was under the management of a committee constituted of the elders of the village, supervisors, and temple managers (*SII*, XVII, No. 492). The same temple, during the time of Rājarāja III (A.D. 1245), was being looked after by the *sthānattārs* (trustees), *dēvakanmis* (official priests), accountant, and *māhēśvara* supervisors. Thus the committee appears to have undergone constitutional modifications as governed by changed conditions in the political field. Occasional references occur in epigraphs mentioning the constitution of joint committee (of the kind in existence for the Naṭarāja temple) set up for the management of other temples.

Although it appears likely that the *tilla* and Perumbar-rappuliyūr had been given as a free gift to the *Pratyabhijnā* settlers and hence they were the virtual owners of this property, the land gifts and transactions that were made to the institution perhaps needed supervision or some kind of control or protection by the officers of the Government. This should have resulted in the formation of joint committees. The Naṭarāja temple was being managed by such committees practically till the 15th century. The priests,

therefore, had not become completely independent of the governmental supervision as at present.

We often find in literature statements to the effect that up to the time of Vikrama Cōḷa (A.D. 1118-1135) "the transactions made on behalf of the temple were in the name of Candēśvara but subsequently they were registered in the name of temple priests and trustees either jointly or severally" (*Ann. Rep. Epigr.*, 1914, Part II, para 14). This opinion has found currency in more modern writings as well (e.g., Somasundaram, 1963). I have not been able to find evidence for this opinion in reference to the Naṭarāja temple. Of the 8 inscriptions of Kulōttunga I that have been collected from this temple (4 in 1888, 2 in 1912 and 1 each in 1918 and 1958/9) none mentions Candēśvara as the intermediary. On the contrary, one of these epigraphs dated in A.D. 1116 categorically gives the composition of the managing committee (117 of 1888). On the basis of this evidence, I am inclined to believe that from the time of Kulōttunga I the organizational affairs of the temple rested in the hands of a joint committee constituted of the king's officers and temple priests.

That the temple has no landed property today (Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946; Somasundaram, 1963) is understandable. In the past, however, the number of land units or villages gifted to the temple by kings and their subjects from the time of Rājendra I to the period of Vijayanagar rulers is really staggering. Many of these records specify lands for the cultivation of flower gardens. Some of these could have gone out of possession of the temple during the period of sectarian quarrels of the 16th century and the rest during the Anglo-French and Anglo-Mysore wars.

II

In order to meaningfully appreciate the ritualistic aspects of the Naṭarāja cult, as seen at present at Chidambaram, it is necessary to obtain a general background of the Śaivite religious environment that was pervading the Tamil country during the 10th to 14th centuries. Although there were a number of well-founded Siva temples in the Cōḷa country during the reign of Āditya I to that of

Parāntaka I (Balasubrahmanyam, 1966, 1971), it is difficult to obtain a picture of the ritualistic modes therein or of the type or types of Śaivism that they represented. Some of the 10th century texts recognize four sects of Śaivism—*Śaiva*, *Pāśupata*, *Kāruṇika siddhānta* and *Kāpālika* (*Bhamati* of Vācaspati Miśra), or *Śaiva*, *Pāśupata*, *Vaiśeṣika*, *Naiyāyika*, (*Yasastilaka* of Sōmadēva). As the latter text was written in South India (Karnataka region) under the patronage of the Rāṣṭrakūtas and as this dynasty had contacts with the Cōla country, the scope of Sōmadēva's work may be deemed to have covered the Tamil land as well. Thus the Śaivite sects that he speaks of could have had their respective following in the Tamil speaking areas also. The dominant sect, however, appears to have been a kind of Pāśupata cult that was strongly influenced by *Śiva Purāṇas*. The Tripuradahana, Samhāra-Tāndavas of Śiva, Śiva residing on the mount Kailās, Rāvaṇa lifting the Kailās, encounters of Brahma and Viṣṇu in finding out the extremities of the column of fire, Dakṣa-Yagna, Durga, Vināyaka, Dakṣiṇāmūrti and Sōmaskanda are frequent motifs that found expression in sculpture and literature of the period. The emphasis appears to have been laid on following the *kriya* and *carya* parts of the *Śaivāgamas*. Visiting the temples regularly, offering worship and prayer to the consecrated *Śiva linga* therein were the most popular aspects of religious practice.

It is in this climate that a small group of followers of the *Pratyabhijnā* school of Śaivism settled down at Chidambaram. Their religious practices emphasized the *yōga* and *jñāna* aspects of *Śaivāgamas*. It should also be noted that the set of *āgamas* they followed were different from the 28 *Śaivāgamas* that are supposed to have been current in the Tamil country. The principal object of meditation of the *Pratyabhijnā* followers was the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon expressing the *pancakṛtya* and *pancākṣara* aspects of Sarvēśvara while the corresponding objects of worship in the local environment was the aniconic *Śiva linga*. The *Pratyabhijnā* thoughts were at a speculative level while the Pāśupata tenets dominated the ritualistic plane. By virtue of their exclusive and yet unobstructive nature, the *Pratyabhijnā* followers drew the attention of the Cōla rulers who were themselves Śaivites of a different cult. The patronage of these monarchs to the *Pratyabhijnists* was motivated by genuine feeling of fellow-travellers, but was not of an involving type. Thus, a monas-

tery was built for the *Pratyabhijnā* immigrants at Perumbarrappuliyūr, this village and some lands were gifted to them, and their object of meditation (the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon) was adored with a kind of innocent wonder. The exclusive background and practices of the *Pratyabhijnists* stood in the way of their making inroads into the contemporary Pāśupata realm and vice versa.

Thus the institution set up at Perumbarrappuliyūr was strictly a monastery for the followers of the *Pratyabhijnādarśana* and never a temple in the Pāśupata sense. The icon of *ānanda tāṇḍava* that was installed in the monastery (*tilla*) was an object of their private meditation but never an image meant to be worshipped in public.

During the regnal years of Rājārāja I and Rājendra I the weft of the Gōlaki school of Śaivism was introduced into the warp of the Pāśupata cult, which, as already stated, had the dominant following in the country. As these two cults had many factors in common, the yarn running in two directions wove themselves into a mutually compact tapestry (Swamy, 1972). This new ritualistic pattern soon established itself as the norm of Śaivism in the Tamil country through the succeeding centuries.

The exclusiveness of the *Pratyabhijnā* following (Naṭarāja cult) was itself its strength as well as weakness. It could not reconcile itself to adopt the new pattern because of the difference in basic tenets and thus was obliged to form its own encystment. The Gōlaki school of Śaivism, because of its less rigid outlook not only adapted itself to local influences but also accepted the icon of *ānanda tāṇḍava* as yet another anthropomorphic form of Śiva. This icon soon found entry into their temples in a specially constructed niche. The visible form given to the *pañcākṛiya* motif was the strongest point of the *Pratyabhijnā* school and it is no wonder that this grandiose conception and execution has left an everlasting mark on the cultural, religious and literary history of the Tamil country.

With the initial placement of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon in the golden-roofed *tilla* at Perumbarrappuliyūr, all these three units—the icon, the *tilla*, and the town (Perumbarrappuliyūr)—began to attract Śaivite devotees as at a centre of pilgrimage. To them, the Naṭarāja institution appeared simply as a temple where there was a

deity of worship; they were prone to expect here also the same type of ritualistic modes as they were accustomed to witness in other contemporary Śiva temples. The rulers also were quick to realize the situation and Kulōttunga I initiated the construction of accessory structures to the *tilla*, thereby endeavouring to superimpose the status of a temple over the monastic institution.

The followers of the Naṭarāja cult were not averse to the public desire. They could not, however, accept *in toto* the type of ritualistic worship that was current in contemporary temples because of the essentially different *āgamas* which they followed. At the same time they could not ignore the popularity of the existing practices in other temples. Therefore it became necessary for them to evolve new formulae for public worship that would retain some of their own traditional elements at the same time incorporating some of the current practices.

It was obviously under these circumstances that 'Naṭarāja Nitya Pūjāsūtram' and 'Pūjāpātanjalām' were composed. Evolution of these ritualistic modes of public worship imparted the complexion of a temple to the Naṭarāja-sthāna (*tilla*). By the end of the 13th century almost all the usual accessory structural units of a temple complex had also been established—a separate *kāmakōṭṭam*, 100-and 1000-pillared *maṇṭapas*, *nṛtta-maṇṭapa* (*ratha maṇṭapa*), *prākāras*, *gōpuras*, etc. (Chapter VI). During the same century the addition of *mūlasthāna* shrine with a *linga* consecrated therein (Chapter IV) completed the complex and thereby superimposed one of the basic elements of the indigenous cult of Śaivism.

The 16th century saw the construction and consecration of the Gōvindarāja shrine within the temple complex (Chapter V). Although this event sparked off a series of sectarian troubles of serious consequences, the institution acquired a new complexion which, in modern times, has given rise to flights of imagination conceiving the Śiva-Viṣṇu amicability as having been in existence from the Pallava times (Chapter VII).

The present-day owner-priests of the temple are mostly *Yajur-vēdins* while a few are *Rgvēdins*; they belong to the *Bōdhayana sūtra* (Ramalingam, 1963). One cannot be very sure whether their ances-

tors also had the same affiliations. If they had been strict followers of the Vēdic religion their objection to the consecration of a Viṣṇu image cannot be explained. It is difficult to understand the exact nature of the Vēdic alliance of the Tillaites at Chidambaram. Because, their faith was completely opposed to Vēdic and Upaniṣadic thoughts from the beginning. Their ritualistic modes were largely drawn from *tāntric* lore. Even in its homeland the system appears to have become obscure by about the 15th century or even earlier and Vēdic rituals and influences infiltrated into the system at the religious level (Kaul, 1925). Could there have been a parallel trend in the case of the *Pratyabhijnists* at Chidambaram?

It may be recalled here that South India had *Vēdic* contacts practically from the time of the Pallavas. The institution and organisation of Caturvēdimangalams were started by the rulers of this dynasty and the custom was carried through with greater vigour by the kings of the succeeding dynasties. There were institutions of this type in the vicinity of Perumbarrappuliyūr itself during the medieval period. By the 13th century, the *Pratyabhijnists* here had already lost much of their exclusiveness due to the impact of the indigenous Śaiva cult. Could it not be possible that they also adopted some of the customs and modes of *Vēdic* religion and judiciously introduced a part of it into the ritualistic pattern of worship in the temple? At present, the only *Vēdic* element that is witnessed is the use of *Vēdic mantras*.

Whether the *dīkṣitars* follow all the other *samskāras* prescribed for *smārtas* is not known. It should also be noted that they do not directly partake of the strictly religious functions or ceremonies in *smārta* households and that they do not recognize the authority of the *smārta maṭhas*. The conduct of worship and other rituals to the Candramaulīśvara linga is suggestive of the domestic type of ritualistic mode performed by the adherents of the *smārta* cult and even here we see a conglomeration of *Vēdic*, *tāntric* and *āgamic* elements. In spite of such vagaries, pointed attention is drawn to the so-called "*Vaidik*" type of worship in the Naṭarāja temple in modern literature and this is claimed as one of the exclusive features of the institution.

A correct understanding of the sectarian affinities of the present-day *dīkṣitars* is further confused by their own claim that Umāpati

śivācārya was one of their ancestors; the seriousness with which they make this statement cannot be assessed. If there be any genuineness in the claim, would it not be natural to expect them to belong to the same community to which Umāpati belonged (if they mean a blood relationship) or to follow the tenets of *Śaiva siddhānta* (if they mean a spiritual ancestry)? There are reasons, however, to deny both these possibilities. The truth appears to be that the present-day *dīkṣitars* have completely forgotten their own ancestry and history.

The early marriageable age among the *dīkṣitar* community is cited as one of their exclusive customs (Ramakrishna Aiyer, 1946; Somasundaram, 1963). There appears to be nothing unique about it. Such is still the general custom in many traditionally inclined families whether *dvijas* or non-*dvijas*. Furthermore a man in the *dīkṣitar* community of today is qualified to perform certain important rituals and worship only after his marriage, and such a member thereby stands a monetary gain. The continuance of this tradition amongst them is therefore to be looked upon as a means of securing an early economic stability rather than conforming to the injunction of the *gr̥hya-sūtras*.

Attention is drawn to their strictly endemic type of marriage alliances. This again cannot be considered as being exclusive to the *dīkṣitars*. There are numerous other castes and communities, particularly of traditional disposition, who do not go outside their own fold for marriage alliances. I am inclined to the view that this custom of the owner-priests of the Naṭarāja temple is a consequence of their geographical isolation over centuries. When a small group of their ancestors initially settled down at Chidambaram they must have lost social contacts with their kin in Kashmir. There are no indications of their increase in number due to subsequent immigrations. Thus, it became incumbent on the settlers to choose matrimonial alliances amongst themselves.

III

A vague suspicion arises whether a major turning point in the Naṭarāja cult could not have occurred in the 16th century following

the consecration of the Viṣṇu shrine (Chapter V) within the precincts of the Naṭarāja temple by Acyutarāya in A.D. 1539. As already mentioned, this event triggered off a never-ending series of sectarian troubles leading to violent outbursts of feelings now and then. There are at least a couple of instances when the clergy of the Naṭarāja shrine, unfortunately though, appear to have exhibited the offensive and upper hand, during such encounters. Once they became involved in such worldly affairs—granting for a moment that their grievances were genuine—, how can they be expected to keep up their *yōgic* and religious disciplines?

It is said that Vaiyappa Krishnappa Koṇḍama Nāyaka, a subordinate chief of Venkaṭa II (A.D. 1586-1614), made provision for 20 offerings to be distributed among the Śaiva mendicants and that the endowments were placed under the supervision of Namaś-śivāya-udaiyār, the superintendent of all *kaṭṭalais* (services) in the temple (349 of 1912, A.D. 1588). Two copper plate grants of the Marāṭṭah king, Śarabhāji, mention that certain gifts made to the temple of Chidambarēśvara were left in charge of one Aghōraśiva-Paṇḍāram (C.P. 16 and 17 of 1946/7, respectively, A.D. 1733 and 1719). Would this not suggest that there was a major change in the administrative set-up of the temple? What had happened to those governmental officers and those *srīkāryam śeivōrs*, *tirumaligaikkūru śeivōrs*, *kōyil nāyakam śeivōrs*, etc., who formed a part of the temple administrative committee, all during the earlier periods? The Vijayanagar dynasties might have preferred to institute their own system of management of the temples, as a consequence of which the previously existing system was discontinued. Could it not be that the non-cooperative and somewhat rebellious attitude of the priests of the Naṭarāja temple towards the Crown, following the consecration of the Gōvindarāja shrine, upset the rulers as a result of which the managerial propriety was taken away from the priests and given over to a third party personnel who were neither the followers of the *Pratyabhijnā* system nor of the Śrivaishṇava religion? The names of the new appointees are strongly suggestive of their *śaiva siddhānta* following; it may be noted that at that time the preceptors of this faith were successfully managing the affairs of a number of Śiva temples in the Tamil country with Tiruvāvaḍuturai as their chief seat. The point then is, how and when the present-day *ḍikṣitars*

regained the ownership of the Naṭarāja temple. This is one of the ticklish aspects in the history of the Naṭarāja temple and there are no definite answers available at present. A critical analysis of the circumstantial happenings give room to draw following inferences:

(a) The *tillaivāḷandaṇars* (the *Tillaites*) were the owners as well as the custodians of the Naṭarāja institution proper; the management of its landed properties were being supervised by a joint committee constituted of these persons and governmental officials until the 15/16th centuries.

(b) In the time of the Aravīḍu house of Vijayanagar, the administrative responsibilities were taken away from the committee and entrusted to *pandārams*. The *andaṇars*, however, were in charge of the conduct of daily worship and other internal routines.

(c) During the period of wars in the 17th and 18th centuries there was a serious disruption in the working of the temple and as a consequence the managing staff as well as the priests moved out of the habitat for considerable stretches of time, involving two or three generations.

(d) When normalcy returned, the descendants of the priests returned with the icon of Naṭarāja, re-established the icon and rehabilitated themselves.

(e) It is likely that their absence from the habitat and the occupation of the place of worship by non-Hindu rulers necessitated elaborate purificatory rituals both for themselves and for the temple prior to reoccupation. These should have involved a series of *dīkṣa* and *prāyaścitta* ceremonies and after having undergone these rituals, they acquired the designation of *dīkṣitars*, a name which continues to the present day.

(f) The *pandāram*, who functions in the office of the “*podu-manuṣyan*” in the meetings conducted by the *dīkṣitars* today (*Ind. Law Rep.*, V, pp. 73.85), is obviously a relic of their having had the *pandārams* as their administrative chiefs a couple of centuries ago.

Part Four: Religion and Philosophy

CHAPTER XI

PRATYABHIJNĀ DARŚANA AND THE CONCEPT OF ĀNANDA TĀNDAVA

I

PRATYABHIGNĀ (RECOGNITION) is a unique act, a complete fusion of subject and object. "The illumination of objects as being present, really exists inside, but is made to appear outside" (*Īśvarapratyabhijnāsūtra*, V. 1). "The Lord, in the aspect of *cit* (individual), being under the influence of desire, causes the totality of objects to shine as if existing outside, (though) without a substratum, like a *yōgi* (ibid., V. 6). The purport is very succinctly expressed in *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* (I.2): *Ātmaiva sarvabhāvēṣu sphuranivṛta cidvibhuh* (Śiva veils Himself in an individual soul, called the inner self, and unfolds His world-drama outside).

One of the basic tenets of the doctrine is the realization that manifestation of the universe is the result of the Power (*Śakti*) of Śiva. Śiva is never devoid of Power and the Power never exists alone by itself. Thus, because Śiva is inseparable from *Sakti*, he is the Supreme Lord. Creation is his sport and the universe has come into being out of his own volition, because He is independent (*svēchchayā*). The universe is made up of appearances which are all real in the sense that they are aspects of the *Śiva-Śakti* (Ultimate Reality).

Śakti has innumerable aspects. Of these, *cit-śakti* is the Power of intelligence or self-luminosity, while *ānanda-śakti*, the Power of independence, which is bliss or joy (*Śivasutrāvimarśinī*, I.19). Śiva's activities are Five-fold—*sr̥ṣṭi* (creation), *sthiti* (maintenance), *samhāra* (destruction), *tirōdhāna* (concealment) and *amugraha* (favour). These represent His sport, in which He brings into play His own consciousness (*cit*) and volition, expressive of bliss (*ānanda*). These ideas are elegantly expressed in a nutshell in the opening verse of *Pratyabhijnāhṛdaya*:

namaśśivāya satatam pancakṛtyābhidāyinē
cidānanda ghanasvātmā paramārthāvabhāsinē

(Obeisance to Śiva, who is always united in the form of *cit* and *ānanda* and expresses Himself in the Five-fold functions).

He is felt everywhere either as *sūkṣma* (microform, invisible) or as *sthūla* (macroform, visible). He is the one aspect of the *ātma* within; in another, the protector of the *kōśa* (body) from without. His dance covers the entire universe and beyond; it is perceived within the space of the heart (*daharākāśa*) as well as in the space outside (*bahirākāśa*) and is the fullest expression of His *spanda* (pulsatory) aspect. Yet His *svēchchā* quality is never exhausted (see the commentaries on the *sūtras*: “nartaka ātmā” and “rangō antarātmā”).

Thus we see that the blueprint in its complete form for a graphic representation of the cosmic *nartaka* in His *ānanda tāṇḍava* aspect had been prepared by the earliest thinkers of the *Pratyabhijnā* school of philosophy. It is difficult to know whether the blueprint was moulded into metal in Kashmir itself—the birth-place of the idea in the 9th century—where the concepts were formulated. The total absence of this motif in the sculptural history of Kashmir or of North India in such early times has directed search for prototypes in the South. When we look for the earliest plastic representations of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* form, we should scrupulously avoid all those forms of icons of Naṭarāja with *catura* and *lalita* poses as well as those dance forms of Śiva shown with more than two pair of arms, as these do not convey the basic *pancakṛtya* motif.*

The only typical form of dance-icon transferring this motif is the one with the lifted left leg and four hands. Three of the hands bear the *mudras* representing the acts of creation, destruction and maintenance; the standing foot suggests concealment and the lifted one, favour. As Zimmer (1946) has observed, “the ‘elephant hand’ indicates the linkage of the three to two, and promises peace to the soul that experiences the relationship”.

* [Nautiyal, (1970) refers to the Naṭarāja shrine at Jageswar as having been built in about A.D. 810. The icon contained therein, according to his statements, as a *tāṇḍava* of Śiva in the *lalita* pose. Therefore, this form of *Nṛtyamūrti* should not be confused with the *ānanda tāṇḍava* aspect.]

Of the earliest representations of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon in South India, a relief in stone from the rock-cut cave temple in Śīyamangalam is referred to by Srinivasan (1960; see also Balasubrahmanyam, 1971). This cave is believed to have been excavated during the time of the Pallava king Mahēndravarmān I (c. A.D. 630). Srinivasan understands the concerned sculpture as being coeval with the cave. There are serious difficulties in accepting the date as well as the identity of the panel. The upper right (proper) hand holds what appears to be the flame while the corresponding left clasps an instrument (axe); the lower right hand is in *abhaya-mudra* while the corresponding left hangs down with no relation to the lifted foot; *Muṇḍalaka* is absent. The drum and the drummer bear strong resemblance to the ones in the well-known Chālukyan Śiva-*tāṇḍava* panel from Ellora. Srinivasan is quite aware of these deviations from the type and cautiously writes: "The pose of the legs almost resembles that of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* form....". Secondly, I am unable to perceive any aspect of the pallava stylistic idiom in this panel. The craftsmanship is very crude, which feature I take to be of a derivatively degenerate type rather than a chronologically primitive one. However crude a Pallava sculpture be, one cannot fail to be impressed with the mobility of outline and the pulsating life-like quality of form. The Śīyamangalam form, on the contrary, is rigid and dead. Arguments that are advanced to the effect that the outlandish nature of the panel could be due to the different texture of the stone and the implements used in the execution of the sculpture are least convincing. Thirdly, while it may be true that the excavation part of the cave belongs to the 7th century, the same need not be taken for granted for all the sculptures contained therein—particularly that of the dancing Śiva into which certain aspects of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* motif has been read. The origins of the *Pratyabhijnā darśana* cannot be traced to periods earlier than the 9th century A.D. Under these circumstances, my personal opinion is that the panel under discussion is of a much later date, perhaps of the Vijayanagar period. The superimposition of this craftsmanship over Pallava architecture and sculpture is a well-known phenomenon in the cultural history of the Tamil land.

Another sculptural "representation of the typical Nāṭarāja in the *ānanda tāṇḍava* form" is also referred to by Srinivasan. This

comes from Tiruvāḷīśvaram temple, Tirunelveli district. The author proposes the first half of the 10th century for this representation in stone. While the *ānanda tāṇḍava* identity of the sculpture appears to be probable, the mutilation of critical parts do not admit of a more precise determination. However, the point here is whether the *ānanda tāṇḍava* representation in stone appeared as early as the date proposed? This form of Śiva remained confined to the limits of Chidambaram until the time of Rājarāja I, and its incorporation into other temples commenced from the early part of the 11th century. Even so, the icons were allocated into specially built niches or improvised alcoves within the temples and never formed an integral part of the structure of the main shrine. Instances of lithic *ānanda tāṇḍava* icons built in as integral parts of constructions are conspicuously few and this trend is indicative of a much later period than the corresponding icons in metal.

II

It is more than mere curiosity to think aloud about the first iconic form of *ānanda tāṇḍava* that was cast to be installed in the *tilla* at Perumbarrappuliyūr. The topic resolves itself around two loci: (i) representations in metal, and (ii) those in stone. It should be recalled in this connection that the *Pratyabhignā* settlement at Perumbarrappuliyūr cannot be older than the time of its origin in Kashmir in the middle of the 9th century. It could have migrated to the South, at the earliest, in the late part of this century. In terms of Cōla history, there is no conclusive evidence to associate kings who preceded Parāntaka I with the settlement. In any case, the southward migration of the *Pratyabhignā* doctrine signifies the movement of the *pancakṛtya* motif.

When the immigrants from Kashmir settled down in the Tamil country, the Śaivite temples in the latter terrain had attained a relatively advanced status with all the important units of the complex—*garbha-gr̥ha*, *ardha-manṭapa*, *mukha-manṭapa*, *kōṣṭhas*, *vimāna*, etc. The Pāśupata legacy from the time of the Pallavas was continuously evolving and enriching iconographic forms of Śiva, executed in stone, amongst which there had also been *samhāra-nṛtya* group

(Dances of Destruction, e.g., *gaja-samhāra*, *tripura-samhāra*, etc.) as well as other *nṛtya-mūrtis* portraying the peaceful (*saumya*) aspects (*sandhyā-tāṇḍava*, *gaurī-tāṇḍava*, etc.) It should not be concluded, however, that these dance motifs served as prototypes for the evolution of the *ānanda-tāṇḍava* form. On the contrary, the latter was evolved independently as an integral part of the *Pratyabhijnā* philosophy (*Sūtra*: “*nartaka ātmā*”).

Metal Icons: Although some examples of bronze images from the Pallava period have come to light, they are relatively of smaller dimensions, and probably served the purposes of domestic worship. The total absence of any reference to metal images in the Pallava inscriptions not only confirms the above inference but also raises an important issue—whether the custom of taking out bronze images in public processions is not of much later origin, as a result of which the techniques for casting large images had to be developed. Such images begin to make their appearance from about the middle part of the 10th century (Srinivasan, P. R., 1956). Under these circumstances, the first icon of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* motif that was associated with the *tilla* could have been of relatively smaller dimensions, suited for private meditation by the inmates. The metal icon of Naṭarāja assigned by Balasubrahmanyam (1971, Plate 5) to the period of Parāntaka I neither conforms to the *ānanda tāṇḍava* type nor to the group of smaller-sized images.

Lithic Icons: The craft of working in stone medium had already attained a zenith during the Pallava period. Therefore the reason for the late appearance of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* form in stone cannot be due to the lack of technical know-how. There was no necessity for installing a lithic image in the *tilla* as it was never conceived as a temple at the time of its founding; also, in spite of its acquiring a physical aura of a temple later, the basic nature of the *tilla* as a monastery (*yōga-sthāna*) remained unaltered till as late as the early part of the 14th century. There were no attempts to substitute a stone icon in place of a metal one in subsequent periods either. In this respect, the *tilla* has maintained its original character till the present-day.

Even during the earlier stages of acceptance of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon by the indigenous Śaiva cult as a member of their

pantheon, only metal representations were chosen to be installed and nowhere do we find the *āgamic* consecration of a lithic icon. The Nāṭarāja image from Pullamangai, referred to the time of Parāntaka I by Balasubrahmanyam (1971, Plate 37) does not depict the *ānanda tāṇḍava*. The earliest and authentic representations of the motif in stone begin to appear in the 11th century as a decorative piece on the *Vimāna* (Gangaikondacōlapuram).

III

It is doubtful if the earliest forms of the *ānanda-tāṇḍava* icon possessed all the embellishments and accessories that we come across in the large-dimensioned images cast from the middle of the 10th century. The Five-fold functions, according to the *Pratyabhijnā* texts, are performed in the limitless space of the Universe and therefore it appears likely that the earliest sculptors depicted the icon as standing free in conformity with the philosophical concept (for example, the one reproduced in *Lalit Kala* No. 10). The enclosing arch (*tiruvāṣi*), in my opinion, is a later superimposition of the indigenous iconographic cult, possibly indicative of deification. Subsequent tradition interpreted the *tiruvāṣi* of *ānanda tāṇḍava* as representing the symbol *OM*.

The *muyalaka* or the *apasmāra-puruṣa* figuring under the standing foot of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon again appears to be an indigenous introduction from *paurāṇic* sources. It should be noted that *muyalaka* is frequently shown in a similar manner in several other anthropomorphic icons of Śiva in the Tamil country from very early times. From the *Pratyabhijnā* point of view, any object under the foot of *ānanda tāṇḍava* would only interject a device which limits the space in that direction. *Muyalaka* has thus obscured the original significance of concealment and has superimposed or substituted secondary meanings such as *pāśa* (bondage), ignorance, etc.

The *panca-kṛtya* dancer being none other than Śiva Himself, many other physical attributes of His have also become transplanted in sculpture so as to emphasize His *Śiva-ness*; all these features are the very ones that are common to the icons of Śiva in general. As

Coomaraswamy (1912) has observed, "Some of the peculiarities of the Naṭarāja images, of course, belong to the conception of Śiva generally and not to the dance in particular. Such are the braided locks as of a *yogi*; the *cassia* garland; the skull of Brahma; the figure of Ganga, the Ganges fallen from heaven and lost in Śiva's hair; the cobras; the different ear-rings, betokening the dual nature of Mahadeva, 'whose half is Uma'." Of these, the *cassia* garland and *datura* flower which form decorative motifs in some icons are, however, purely subjective identifications. Grafting of factors such as these on the *pancakṛtya* concept and reading new meanings into them are examples of syncretism leading towards the absorption of an alien cult object into the indigenous fold.

IV

Yōgic and *āgamic* (*tāntric*, particularly of the *Pūrva Caula* category) practices constitute the matrix for the evolution of the *Pratyabhijnā* school of thought. Certain mystic symbols constituted of *akṣaras* (letters of the alphabet) have been held to possess not only the great secret of the Ultimate Reality, but also efficacy at the practical level for a *yōgi*. The origin and significance of the *akṣaras* and *mantras* are described at great length in commentaries on *sūtras* (e.g. "*mātrika cakra sambōdhah*", see Sivasutravimarsinī; the first *sūtra* in Spandanirṇaya, etc.). The Power forms the vitality of the *mantras*; She is identical with the universe of sound (*nāda*) and with the supreme egoity of infinite consciousness, exulting in glory the wide world over. The *nāda*, in reality, expresses the unified form of the letters from *a* to *kṣa* (Kaul, 1925). The expression of the Five-fold functions is also hence called the *nādānta* dance.

Ksēmarāja's commentary on the *sūtra*, "cittam mantrah" runs thus: "Mantra is that by which the nature of Paramēśvara *mantrayātē*, that is, is meditated on by means of secret *mantra*". Srinivasa Iyengar (1912), the translator, has added a footnote: "... a mantra is that which declares the secret. The text of the *vṛtti* translated above, refers to the idea of 'secret' to the *mantra* itself. But Krishнадasa defines a *mantra* in the *vārtika* of this passage, to be that by which the secret nature of Īśvara is meditated on, thus transferring

the adjective to Īśvara's nature." A furtherance of arguments along these lines led to the evolution of the concept of *mantra-svarūpa* (*mantra-bodied*) of Śiva.

The Five-lettered unit *na-ma-si-va-ya* was looked upon with great sanctity at the practical level of the *Pratyabhijnā* philosophy (Tantrālōka). These represent in one context the different parts of Śiva's body and in another the mystic sounds (*mantras*) of the symbolic *yantras* (*cakras*) on which the *sādhakas* (persons undergoing the discipline) are to concentrate upon. Such formalizations are believed to represent the *sūkṣma-sarīra* (micro-body, invisible body), implying the non-anthropomorphic aspect of Śiva. It is said that the golden *bilva* leaves hung on the '*rahasya*' panel in the *cit-sabhā* contain the engravings of some of the *yantras* which are indicative of the one or the other of the philosophical aspects of the *Pratyabhijnā* context—*Srīcakra*, *cit-ambara cakra*, *Sammēlanacakra*, *tiraskaraṇīcakra*, *ānandacakra*, etc. (The morphology of some of these *yantras/cakras* are referred to in Tirumantiram).

CHAPTER XII

PRATYABHIJNĀ LITERATURE IN THE TAMIL COUNTRY

THE PRATYABHIJNĀ SETTLERS at Perumbarrappuliyūr and their early descendants in the Cōla country were not a group of mere lay followers of the system. They continued to maintain the philosophy as a living institution, furthering and elaborating the thought as evidenced by the texts which some of them wrote in the early centuries of the second millennium A.D.

Mahēśvarānanda (son of Mādhava) lived in the Cōla country (Chidambaram, according to Raghavan, 1961). He was a pupil of one Mahāprakāśa who wrote *Ānanda tāṇḍava vilāsa stōtra* in which the *Pratyabhijnā* concept of the universe is embodied. Mahēśvarānanda was a staunch follower of the doctrinal school of Abhinavagupta and was the author of some texts; we learn from his own writings that he modelled his texts on the method of Abhinava and acquired his proficiency in poetics by studying the *Dhvanyālōka* and *Lōcana*; his knowledge of the Self was acquired by his following the path of *Pratyabhijnā* (Pandya, 1935; *Mahārtha Manjarī*, 202). Māhāprakāśa and his teacher also belonged to the Cōla country. The latter (whom Mahēśvarānanda calls *parama-guru*) was also the author of some doctrinal texts —*Krama Vāsanā* and *Rjvimarsinī*, of which we know from references to them in *Mahārtha Manjarī* written by Mahēśvarānanda. This author wrote also a commentary called *Parimala* on the same text. While these are the only two texts that have come down to us, we learn from *Parimala* that he was the author of a few more—*Samvidullāsa*, *Pādukōdaya*, *Mahārthōdaya*, *Sūkta*, *Parā-stōtra*, *Kuṇḍalābharāṇa*, *Mukunda kēli*, *Kōmalavallī* and *Nakha Pratāpa*. The contexts under which these texts are referred to clearly indicate their doctrinal content of the *Pratyabhijnā* philosophy.

The way in which the icon of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* enraptured the hearts of the Tamil populace has been explained in Chapters X,

XI. Their contacts with the *Pratyabhijnists* caused mutual diffusion of ideas and practices. As a result, quite a volume of literature has grown in the Tamil language in which the devotees have given expression to their thoughts on the Lord of Tillai. A large proportion of such literature is devotional in the same strain as the *tēvarāms* and looks upon the *ānanda tāṇḍava* image as just another version of Śiva—Śiva as a healer of mental troubles, as the presiding deity of the universe, as the One who alone destroys the wicked and protects the worthy, etc. This attitude is further evidenced in the descriptive phraseology and in the frequent allusions which the authors make to the well-known *paurāṇic* episodes in which Śiva's mighty and glorious acts are recorded—Śiva cutting off a head of Brahma; Śiva's *ardhanārīśvara*-form; his gratification in listening to or chanting the Vēdas; his killing the elephant, the snake, the tiger; his burning the Three Cities; Lingōdbhava episode; Rāvaṇa lifting the Kailās mountain; Candēśa story; etc. The compositions of Gandarāditya, Paṭṭinattuppiḷaiyār and of many other devotees are in no way different. Such a situation clearly conveys the superimposition of local factors from the literary side leading towards syncretization in the act of absorbing the icon of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* into their cult. The same trend is seen throughout the literature of later periods as well, but with a much more pragmatic tenor.

In spite of this prevailing situation there are a few texts in Tamil which contain unmistakable *Pratyabhijnā* idioms. These are of course intermixed with the general contents in varying proportions and emphasis. Of such texts may be mentioned some stray parts of *Tiruchchirrambalak-kōvai*, 8th and 9th *tantras* of *Tirumantiram* and excerpts in *Unmainerivilakkam*, *Tiru-undiyār*, *Tiru Kalirrupaḍai* and *Tiru arut payan*. The modern, strongly Śaiva-siddhānta-oriented commentaries, however, obscure the *Pratyabhijnā* content in these works.

The overall import of the text *Unmaivilakkam* is clearly an exposition of one important aspect of the *Pratyabhijnā* doctrine. The author, Maṇavācakamkaḍandār ('one who transcended the mind and speech') has chosen to explain the inter-related significance of the 36 *tattvas* (principles), 'I' and 'You', the *ānanda tāṇḍava* expressive of the Five-fold functions and the Five letters (*si-va-ya-na-ma*) (stanza 2). The 36 *tattvas* are, of course, not exclusive to the *Pratya-*

bhijnā system alone, and are recognized by other Śaivite schools as well; but, the author's purpose in discussing the relation of this to the *panca-kṛtya* and *pañcākṣara* themes indicate that the *tattvas* here are to be taken strictly in the *Pratyabhijnā* sense.

The 'ānandayōga' (stanza 3) is the same as the 'anandōpāya', also called 'anupāya mārḡa'; "It is called 'anupāya', not because there is no use of any means whatsoever, but because the elaborate means are but of little importance. It is the path by following which the Ultimate is realized even without *bhāvanā*' (Pandey, 1935).

The 'suttavittai' (Śuddhavidyā) referred to in stanza 21 is to be taken in the sense of *mahāmāyā* as explained in the *Īśvarapratyabhijnāvimarśinī* (II. 200). After describing the qualities of the 36 *tattvas*, the author dwells upon the meaning of *nāda* (sound) and letters (*akṣaras*). In order to understand the import in the correct perspective, it is necessary to take the help of the *Pratyabhijnā* texts like *Śivasūtravimarśinī* and *Spandanirṇaya*. The ideas contained in stanzas 29-31 bear direct relation to the *sūtra*: "vidyā-śarīra-sattā mantra-rahasyam" (*Śivasūtravimarśinī*, III. 1). *Tantrālōka* further elaborates the letter-bodied (*mantra-svarūpa*) nature of the Lord. Stanzas 32 and 33 equate the sacred Five letters with the different parts of His dancing body. The Five-fold functions of the Lord as conceived in the *ānanda tāṇḍava* form constitute the subject-matter of stanzas 35, 36. As mentioned earlier, this idea is exclusive to the *Pratyabhijnā* doctrine amongst the Śaivite schools. The reference to 'parai' (stanza 38) has to be understood in the sense of Śiva-Śakti or Parā-Śakti, the consciousness of Īśvara; she is Consciousness, Pure, Universal and Unlimited; hence she is *svachchanda* (independence); she is vibratory energy that drives the cosmos (Tripathi, 1969).

The active phase of the *Pratyabhijnā* philosophy at Chidambaram began to decline after the 13th century. The increasing popularity of the Gōlaki school of Śaivism was apparently one of the main reasons for the almost complete disappearance or mergence of many minor Śaivite cults in the Tamil country (Swamy, 1972). In any case, the latter began to lose their purity under the impact of the dominant cult. The *Pratyabhijnā* cult at Chidambaram was no exception. This being largely a speculative system failed to attract

the masses. The superimposition of ritualistic trends of indigenous nature and of qualities of a temple on the otherwise monastic institution submerged its pristine character thereby rendering the institution as just another Śaivite centre of public worship. The litanic literature that grew in connection with the public worship of Naṭarāja combined the private ritualistic practices of the *Tillites* with those that were current in other Śiva temples (Chapter X). The *nāmāvalis* (garland of epithets) and *stōtras* (praises) that were composed in reference to the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon during later period are thus hardly indistinguishable from those composed in respect of any other form of Śiva.

CHAPTER XIII

A PRATYABHIJNĀ POCKET IN THE TAMIL COUNTRY

ON THE BASIS OF the queries raised and rationalizations reached, an attempt is made in this chapter to recreate the events connected with the origin and growth of the *Pratyabhijnā* school of Śaivism as expressed by the Naṭarāja cult in the Tamil country. A great handicap, however, has been the non-availability of full texts of the bulk of inscriptions concerning the problem directly or indirectly. Several manuscripts—particularly in the Samskr̥t language—which could possibly throw more light on the cult of Naṭarāja still lie hidden in the personal custody of the present-day owner-priests of the temple and are therefore not available to the public. More than all, the relevant siftable data from available sources are admittedly fragmentary and several bits of the jigsaw puzzle are yet to be discovered, while some of the available ones have their outlines mutilated and do not lend themselves for accurate placement. In spite of these inadequacies, it is felt that a relatively reliable general outline may be obtained by piecing together the available information, which, however, I must emphasize, should be looked upon only as a working hypothesis for further studies.

The ruling dynasty of Kashmir in the 8th century had established connections with the Rāṣtrakūṭa territories in South India. Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa (A.D. 724-761) had overrun these areas, perhaps as far south as the Deccan (Bamzi, 1962), while the Rāṣtrakūṭa-influenced zone extended further south along the 12°N latitude cutting across the South Pennar river (Altekar, 1967). Following Lalitāditya's rule a long period of tyranny and oppression ensued in Kashmir through the reigns of Vinayāditya Jayapīḍa, Avantivarman and Samkavarman, practically till the end of the 9th century, during which period there was a conspicuous exodus of scholars from Kashmir to South India (Raghavan, 1961).

However, in spite of the troubled conditions, Kashmir had been the fountainhead of some important Śaiva texts of basic nature:

Śiva sūtra and *Spanda kārikā* by Vasugupta, a commentary on the latter by Kallaṭa, *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* by Sōmānanda, and possibly the Paramārthasāra of Ādiśēṣa (Patanjali), all of which laid down the foundation for the *Pratyabhijnā* system of philosophy. It is within the limits of available data to presume that a group of families who had accepted this system migrated to Tamil country and settled down at Perumbarrappuliyūr (modern Chidambaram) sometime in the late 9th or more likely in early 10th century during the regnal years of Parāntaka I (A.D. 907-955). This surmise is strengthened by the statement in Kongudēśa rājākkal (Ramachandran Chettiar, 1950) that Vīracōḷarāya (who has been identified as Parāntaka I, see Arokiaswamy, 1956) built the '*Kanaka-sabha*' at Chidambaram.

The immigrants drew the attention of the ruling Cōḷa monarch. As he was himself a follower of Śaivism, his sympathies must have urged him to extend his hand of patronage to the newcomers although their philosophical tenets were different from those of his own faith. The immigrants settled down at Perumbarrappuliyūr and this village was made over to them as a *dēvadāna* gift. Thus, this village administratively came to enjoy the status of a *taniyūr* (Chapter I).

The immigrants built a monastery on the land gifted to them and called it *tilla*, which conveyed the same meaning in their dialect. This structure served as a place for their meditation and *yōgic* practices. It was a sort of community centre, a place for meditation and *yōgic* practices for all members of their community. As at present, they lived somewhere near the *tilla* and visited it exclusively for religious and spiritual purposes. It is also possible that some of them, who had reached an advanced stage of *yōgic* attainments, actually spent a major part of their life in the *tilla* itself (Appendix A, inscription 2, verse 27). The existing system of offering cooked food individually by the *dīkṣitars* to Naṭarāja every day appears to be an old tradition and testifies to their personal intimacy with the *tilla* in that it represented their own property collectively. In other words, this institution is like a *pūja* room in the household of joint family where its members offer worship individually.

The factors which contributed towards the founding of the *tilla* were not different from those in reference to many other monas-

teries and *maṭhas* (*guhais*) in the Tamil country. Epigraphic literature not infrequently refers to the gift of land for building monasteries or to the gift of built monasteries to religious leaders by the members of the ruling houses or their subjects. When once they were formally given over to the party or individual, the structure became the property of the donee. This is just what happened to *tilla* at Perumbarrappuliyūr.

The architectural features of the *tilla* were such that it served as a *naiṣṭhika-sthāna* for the followers of the *Pratyabhijnā darśana*; in other words, it was never meant to be a temple, that is, a *mūla-sthāna* or *garbhagrha* in the technical sense. It had a raised stone basement with a superstructure of perishable materials, much the same way as it is today. The basement contained a chamber with an entrance from the superstructure. The latter was obviously exposed to the public view and served as a place for housing the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon, the object of their meditation, while the concealed (secret) chamber was used for private *yōgic* practices.

When the *Tillaites* needed an object which they could concentrate upon during their *dhyāna* (meditation) they thought of no other motif than the very backbone of their philosophical system—the *pancakṛtya* motif. The sculptor created a graphic representation of the concept in metal. The result was a sublime poem in bronze. It is this that hallmarked the *tilla* and the *Pratyabhijnā* system in the South.

The *tilla* (Tamil *tillai*) began to draw progressively larger crowds of lay devotees not only because of its peculiar architectural features and gilded roof, but also on account of the rather exclusive habits and customs of the *Tillaites*. The greatest attraction was, however, the iconographic form of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* aspect of Śiva. To a lay devotee, the icon was yet another form of Śiva rhythmically dancing in a most aesthetically inspiring and arresting pose; to the enlightened few, the grandeur of the philosophical concept hidden in the icon—the Lord performing the mystic dance of the *pañcakṛtyas* (the Five-fold Functions) in the expanse of *cit*, symbolized in *cit-ambaram* or *cit-sabha*—was captivating.

The gilded roof of the *tilla* was the first of its kind in the whole of South India and so also the *ānanda-tāṇḍava* icon; These drew a

large measure of public attention and hence became a centre of pilgrimage. The situation necessitated a reorientation and re-adjustment in the type of rituals that were being performed to the icon of *ānanda tāṇḍava* to satisfy the spiritual and religious longings of the public; such a change became all the more necessary because of the awareness of the public to the ritualistic modes that were in vogue in the contemporary Śiva temples in the land (Chapter X). About this period when the Naṭarāja cult was thus gaining popularity, Gaṇḍarāditya is believed to have become an ardent devotee of Naṭarāja and composed verses in His praise.

It is a significant fact that there are no records of Rājarāja I and Rājendra I pertaining to *cit-ambaram* or Naṭarāja in the temple at Chidambaram. This fact has already been noted by Balasubrahmanyam (1943/4) and Harle (1963). It is strange indeed that Rājarāja I, who called himself *śivapādaśēkhara*, should have shown a nonchalant attitude towards the increasing popularity of Naṭarāja. This situation is, however, understandable in view of the fact that his personal religion as well as that of his son was altogether a different cult of Śaivism. As shown elsewhere (Swamy, 1972), they had accepted the *Siddhānta Śaiva* tenets which had been introduced into the Tamil country by the Gōlaki school and these kings themselves were largely responsible for the stabilization and spread of this cult under their patronage. They had even accepted the teachers of this school as *rājagurus* (royal preceptors) and as such their preference to the cult of their following is understandable. Yet it should not be misconstrued that they were intolerant of other cults of Śaivism or even of Naṭarāja. That Rājarāja was enthralled by the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon is illustrated not only by allowing his queen to install a replica of this icon in the name of Ādavallān in the Bṛhadīśvara temple, Tanjore (*SII*, II, No. 41), but also by naming two of the units of measures after the name of this deity (Ādavallān). Rājendra, also animated by the grandeur of the icon, had it sculptured on the *vimāna* of the temple at Gangaikondacōlapuram.

The Gōlaki school of Śaivism began to exert its growing influence from the time of Rājarāja I and from then onwards the succeeding Cōla kings and their subjects largely accepted this faith. Yet, the general catholicity of these kings in matters of religion did not interfere with other contemporary religious faiths in their

dominion; they even extended a patronizing gesture to them. Until Kulōttunga I appeared on the scene, the Naṭarāja cult at Chidambaram was looked upon as one of the minor Śaivite movements. Śiva as the supreme principle was a thought that pervaded both in the *Pratyabhijnists* and in the indigenous cult as well. The former cult laid more emphasis on *yōga* and did not accept the consecrated *linga* as the object of adoration. Their object of meditation—the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon—stole the heart and soul of the indigenous Śiva cult. Even when the esoteric meaning of this icon was ignored, its exomorphic form evoked a spontaneous exuberance of aesthetic grace, artistic grandeur and a charm that caused voluntary acceptance. Although they had been very much aware of other forms of Śiva's dances—which were all expressions of *ghōra* (fierce) or *samhāra* (destructive) aspects—here was something wholly different in concept and absolutely new in execution; it was intellectually profound according to which the *Sarvēśvara* was conceived as dancing eternally out of his own *cit* (consciousness) revelling himself in pure *ānanda* (bliss) and serene *jnāna* (knowledge) (Chapter XI). The popular appeal of the *ānanda tāṇḍavamūrti* dramatically pushed out the importance of other dancing forms of Śiva to the background.

Although Kulōttunga I had some Cōḷa blood in him, his long association with Vengi country had not exposed him to the rather endemic religious environment in which his predecessors had lived in the Cōḷa country. After he took over the reign of the latter dominion, the Naṭarāja cult catalysed a more positive response in his heart, which prompted him to execute constructional activities for the *tilla*. In this act, he received the fullest cooperation from his officer Naralōkavīra. The Naṭarāja cult in the Tamil country from the beginning of the 11th century was a living movement and Chidambaram was its centre (Chapter XII). The scholarly atmosphere that pervaded in and around the *tilla* could also have been an added factor which animated Kulōttunga I and Naralōkavīra to execute such of those plans which would raise the status of the *tilla* (monastery) to that of a full-fledged temple.

The succeeding kings of the Cōḷa line continued to patronize the Naṭarāja cult and the gilding of the roof of the *cit-ambaram* in particular was looked upon as a prestige issue. The 12th and 13th centuries reveal numerous epigraphs of Cōḷas, Pāṇḍyas, and of some

minor dynasties which refer to the establishment of the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon in various Śaivite temples throughout the Tamil country. This radiation is to be looked upon more as a result of popular adoration of the icon than of the thought behind it. It may also be noted that generally the platform on which the image stood was constructed specially high so as to remind one of the *tilla* and the shrine itself invariably faced south, as does the *tilla* at Chidambaram. These shrines, in many places, received special endowments for the conduct of regular worship and festivals, and in some cases, the very same ceremonies as obtained for Naṭarāja at the *tilla* were also instituted.

Here is one of the rare instances where a major cult adopts the symbol of a minor faith more through emotional import rather than by reason and conviction. By the 13th century, this trend had become so strong that some of the then existing religious writings concerning Naṭarāja readily found incorporation into the *tirumurais*. The compositions of Gaṇḍarāditya, Tirumāligai dēvar, parts of Tirumantiram and of Tiruchchirrambalakkōvai belong to this category (Chapter XII). It is important to note in this connection that the codification of the *tirumurais* is itself an endeavour towards amalgamation and consolidation of diverse Śaivite faiths that were in vogue in the country, thereby enlarging the scope and complexion of the Gōlaki school of thought (Swamy, 1972). Therefore, the only criterion for a composition to be included into the *tirumurais* was its Śaiva-centred theme irrespective of its sectarian content.

A second stream of religious literature, essentially of doctrinal nature, was codified in the late 14th or early 15th century. The constituent texts are collectively known as *Siddhānta śāstras* and form the basic canonical literature in the Tamil language expounding the tenets of *Śaiva siddhānta*. Some of these texts have adapted certain elements from the *Pratyabhignā* system—the concept of the Five Letters and of the Five Functions. It appears as if these concepts are forced on the *Śaiva siddhānta* system. The feeling that these ideas have not welded themselves successfully and completely into the core is inevitable. The fact is that while these concepts are spontaneously and directly applicable to the Naṭarāja cult, they can never be cogently fitted into the framework of the Śiva *linga* concept

which is the chief object of worship and meditation in the Śaiva *siddhānta* system.

While the reorganization of rituals in *tilla* contributed in a measure towards obviating the basic complexion of a monastery, the structural additions and elaborations of architectural features by the ruling dynasties completed the process of superimposition of the temple-idiom. By the end of the 13th century, the *tilla* had attained the full status and symbol of a full-fledged temple, almost completely obscuring its monastic nature (Chapter VI).

In spite of these superimposed factors, Chidambaram continued as a creative centre of *Pratyabhijnā* studies and the inherent monastic nature of the *tilla* had been still maintained. It is during these years that Mahāprakāśa and Mahēśvarānanda lived. This period saw the production of certain important canonical texts of the *Pratyabhijnā darsana* (Chapter XII). With the systematization of *Siddhānta sāstra* texts (14-15th centuries), the philosophical aspects of the *Pratyabhijnā darsana*, as symbolized in the Naṭarāja cult, receded to the background and the institution at Chidambaram became just another routine temple with the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon as the chief object of worship therein. The largest number of *stōtra* (prayer) literature produced during the succeeding periods look upon the *ānanda tāṇḍava* icon as just another *rūpa* of Śiva fulfilling mundane desires and ambitions, while the *sthalapurāṇa* literature became involved in weaving legends on such themes.

From the 13th to the 16th centuries the Naṭarāja institution at Chidambaram continued its existence as just another Śiva temple with no eventful happenings. The consecration of the Gōvindarāja shrine within the precincts of the Naṭarāja-territory in the 16th century introduced a new trend which, though not intended, resulted in a series of sectarian troubles (Chapter V). It appears very likely that the Vijayanagar rule had also changed the administrative pattern of the temple, as a consequence of which certain *paṇḍārams* had taken over the management (Chapter X). The Anglo-French and Anglo-Mysore wars in the ensuing centuries caused a serious disruption in the conduct of the institution because of the conversion of the temple into a garrison. These wars necessitated the temple staff to move away to places of safety. During

these periods of disruption some of the practices and traditions that were exclusive to the Naṭarāja cult disappeared, particularly those pertaining to the personal *yōgic* discipline of the priests. When they returned to their original habitat after normalcy was regained, the temple was thoroughly renovated, reconstructed and repaired. The “re-consecration” of the Naṭarāja icon was attended by a series of purificatory rites as required by tradition, and following this, the priests came to be known as *dīkṣitars*. This was also the occasion of the installation of the ‘rahasya’ panel after closing the entrance to the cellar of the *tilla* (Chapter VIII).

EPILOGUE

THERE ARE INDICATIONS that immigrants from Kashmir to South India during the 10th and subsequent centuries constituted a heterogeneous assemblage. While the followers of the *Pratyabhijnā* system settled down at Chidambaram, families of other religious following appear to have migrated to other places. Raghavan (1961) draws attention to the practice of the "early Smartaism not modified by later sectarian systems or devotional movements" of the *namputuri* community of Kerala and refers to the discovery of manuscripts of early Samskr̥t classics in their houses, thus pointing to their original home in Kashmir. He also cites the cases of Bilhana and the family of Śārṅgadēva (the author of the musical treatise, *sangītaratnākara*) who found patronage under the Yadava kings of Devagiri. Amongst families who appear to belong to other professions, the "kōṭṭai pillaimārs" of Srīvaikunṭam, Tirunelveli district, appear to be settlers from Kashmir according to their family chronicles.

A pertinent question arises in regard to the route taken by the immigrants to reach their destinations and also whether there are instances of *Pratyabhijnā* settlements anywhere else between Kashmir and Chidambaram. As things stand, no definite answer is forthcoming. All the same, there appear to be some suggestive data to presume that the Kashmir Śaivism did play a significant part in the flowering of the Vīraśaiva movement in the Karnāṭaka country. An analysis of the contents of some of the *vacanas* (prose compositions) of the early writers on this cult reveal close similarities to the thought contained in the *Pratyabhijnā* texts, *spandakārika* and *spandanirṇaya*. According to Krishna Rao (1970), Chennabasava, one of the pioneers of this movement, was himself a follower of the *Pratyabhijnā* doctrine. Krishna Rao further sees the doctrine of the *triśa* system in the Marathi work, *Jnānēśvarī*. The geographical locale of these religious movements lies in Kolhapur and Bijapur districts, thereby providing a link to connect the *Pratyabhijnā* centres of Kashmir and Chidambaram. It may be noted, however, that while the system retained its brand in spite of local

influences at Chidambaram, it became absorbed into the Vīraśaiva cult in the Karnāṭaka country.

Many of the Śaiva cults of today appear to be the end products of a series of mutual syncretizations and superimpositions that were interpolated during their growth. An objective analysis of the contents of their canonical literature and of their ritualistic modes is likely to reveal the nature of the indigenous or alien elements incorporated into the cult. It is probable that the results of such studies may bring to the surface the hidden elements of Kashmir Śaivism in the contemporary Śaiva cults that are distributed between Kashmir and the Vindhyas. As mentioned earlier, the *Pratyabhijnā* system was obsolete in its very place of birth by the 13th century and it is doubtful if it continued in its unadulterated or undiluted form elsewhere in India during subsequent periods, although it is likely to have had a share in the evolution of some of the offshoot cults of Śaivism in general.

APPENDIX A

TWO INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE NAṬARĀJA TEMPLE, CHIDAMBARAM

NARALŌKAVĪRA, an officer of Kulōttunga I (A.D. 1070-1120) played an important part in the initial architectural expansion of the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram. Two of the inscriptions incised during his period appear to contain, among other things, certain terms or phrases which have a bearing on the *pratyabhijnā* character of the institution. It is tempting to suggest that the composer of these records could have himself been a follower of this cult.

The texts of these epigraphs are published in *South Indian Temple Inscriptions*, Vol. III, Part (ii), edited by T. N. Subrahmaniam (1957). Both the inscriptions are in Samskr̥t language written in *grantha* script. The editor has suggested alternative readings in a number of places which have helped to understand the purport in a clearer light, and these readings have been incorporated into the text transliterated here. Yet, there are several parts of the inscriptions that do not convey cogent meaning due to defective language and a re-reading of the originals would be beneficial.

For details concerning the editing of the text see Swamy and Nanjundan, 1972.

INSCRIPTION 1

This inscription is engraved on the outside wall of the first enclosure and was reported in the *Annual Report* of the Epigraphic Department for the year 1888, bearing the number 115. The inscription consists of two Samskr̥t verses. Hultzsch published the full text with translation in 1898/9 (*EI*, V, No. 13A). In *South Indian Temple Inscriptions* the epigraph bears No. 1270.

Verse 1

Pāndyānām daṇḍēna jītvā pracura śaramucā
 panca pancā (nana) sṛī
 dugdvā ko (rṭa) t̥āra durgān
 (garadandam) tṛṇamiva (ā) sayathā
 khāṇḍavam pāṇḍasūnuh
 piṣṭvātāt kēraḷānam balamati
 ba (ha) ḷam srikulōttungacōḷam
 sakrapratāpa (h) tribhuvanavijaya
 stambhamambōdhi (tīrē)

NOTE: Subrahmaniam suggests the substitution of *bahalam* for *bahalam* in line 7. We are inclined to change it as *bahulam*; we also suggest the substitution of *dagdvā koṭṭāradurgān tṛṇamiva sayathā* in place of *dugdvā ko (rṭa) t̥āra durgān (garadandam) tṛṇamiva*.

Translation: The glorious lion (Kulōttunga) conquered the Five Pāṇḍyas with the help of an army which discharged many arrows and burnt the fort of Koṭṭāra as if it was made of straw, just as the son of Pāṇḍu had burnt the Khāṇḍava (forest). Kulōttunga (who resembled Indra in valour) also destroyed the great army of the Kēraḷas and installed a pillar on the sea-shore to commemorate his conquest of the three worlds:

Verse 2

puṇyē sahyādri sṛṅgē tribhuvana
 vijayastambhamambōdhi tīre
 savachchandōpāsīnā tau
 yuvatibhīrgīyateyasyakīrtih
 sasrīman astra śastra
 prabalabalaiḥ pancapāndyān vijitya
 kṣubhyatksmāpālacakram savidhikamakarōt
 srikulōttunga cōḷah

Translation: (and) whose glory is sung by young women and those who adored the *svachchanda*.* He, the glorious, after conquering the five Pāṇḍavas by the strength of his arms and ammunition, scattered his enemies; the glorious Kulōttunga then ruled according to law.

* This refers to the *svachchanda tantra*, one of the basic texts of the *pratyabhijnā* school of philosophy (Kashmir Śaivism).

INSCRIPTION 2

This is a longer inscription of the time of Kulōttunga I, first noted in the *Annual Report* of the Epigraphic Department for the year 1888, bearing the number 120. It consists of 31 Samskr̥t verses and 36 Tamil verses in *veṇbā* meter. The full text is published in *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. IV, and bears the number 225. In *South Indian Temple Inscriptions* it is printed under the numbers 1271, 1272 and 1273.

The Tamil verses, as observed by Subrahmaniam, generally repeat the purport of the corresponding Samskr̥t verses and the last five verses give some additional items of benefactions done by Naralōkavīra. It should be noted, however, that the first 31 Tamil *veṇbās* do not give the complete purport of the corresponding Samskr̥t verses; generally they emphasize only the benefaction aspect of the content. This situation raises the question whether the Tamil versions could not have been later interpolations, by which time the *pratyabhignā* contexts had gone out of vogue.

Verse 1

cakrētēna sabhāpatē tribhuvanakṣēmāya nṛttam param
kurvāṇasya tadēkatāna manasā mānāvatārēṇa yat
tanmattasrūṇu sāvadhānamadhunā yastōtrapātraśśataih
vaktrairdēhabhṛtaścaranti sarasam dyāvāpṛthivyō dvayōh

Translation: The Lord of the Hall (Naṭarāja) whose body is both earth and heaven dances for the good of the Three worlds. The devoted benefactions of Mānāvatāra (Naralōkavīra) to Him are so numerous that even a hundred mouths are inadequate to describe. Hear of them from me with patience.

Verse 2

nyadhita niravasāna jyōtiṣō vīdhidīpa
nihatamasi viluptē tairasamkhairajasram
tapanatuhinabhāsō ratra sarvārcanārthā
dinakaranikaratvādēva sārthahprakāśah

Translation: He (Naralōkavīra) set up numerous street lamps in order to dispel darkness thereby radiating light—just as the sun removes darkness and spreads his radiance—for the sake of devotees who worship the Lord.

Verse 3

ba.....ndrāṇira kuruta lasatvīdhikayā mumuṣyā
 ssēkam kartum mudita bhuvanēṣu savēṣusmarārēh
 ētāstattat samayanihitaihpūritahpuṇyatōyai
 tadbhaktyanandayāti hṛdayaistulyatām bhaktipūrṇaiḥ

Translation: With his heart filled with devotion, he caused the streets to be sprinkled with holy waters on festive occasions (thereby) honouring Śiva, the vanquisher of Love.

Verse 4

Śivayajanavibhūti sphītayē sphītabhaktiḥ
 kramukadaśasahasrī pancakamtatra cakrē
 haranaṭana visīrnāpībagangāmbusēka
 pramudita iva patrairyatra pūgāścalanti

Translation: He, whose wealth is the adoration of Śiva, out of his spontaneous devotion to Him, caused the formation of a plantation of 50,000 areca palms; this was sprinkled with the waters of Ganga which gushed out of the matted hair of Śiva's head during his dance.

Verse 5

śuci kusuma samudragrastadigvyōmasīma
 drumavanamanurupam tatra patyābyadhata
 viṣamanayana lāśyalōkanayāgatānām
 vibudha parivṛḍānām vyāhṛtairvyapatapārśvam

Translation: Out of devotion, he caused the formation of a garden, the flowers of which were worthy of being offered (to the Lord); the garden extended upto the seas and was filled with the bustle of the gods who came to witness the dance (of Śiva).

Verse 6

viracayadapi śambhōrmanṭapam tīrthayātrā
 samucitamucitagnah saiṣapārē samudram
 lalitalaharībahūryasya pārśvēpayōdhiḥ
 prañatimiva vidhattē vanyamaprakṣayāya (?)

Translation: He constructed a hall for Śambhu (Śiva) on the sea-shore for the purpose of the sacred pilgrimage; the arm-like rolling wave of the sea looked as though it was inviting the devotees.

Verse 7

tasyāntikē madhura pāvana bhūritōyam
 tōyāśyam hṛdayamambu nidhērivaiśah
 kṛtvā vaṭam sumanasāmpi tīrthayātrā
 vistārayōgyamakarōdiha samvidhānām

Translation: He constructed a tank nearby filled with plenty of sweet and pure water, which resembled the heart of the sea. The banyan tree (standing nearby) with spreading crown accommodated the pilgrims.

Verse 8

nāmnā tannaralōkavīramakarōt
 sālammahāntam prabhōh
 tasmin ēṣa sabhānaṭahparapura
 pradvamsa dīkṣāgurūh
 yat ṣṛṅgāgranibaddhakētanapaṭāh
 nedīyasā bhāsvatā
 taptāntah kṣiti vallabhantiśīśira
 vyōmāpagāyah payah

Translation: Naralōkavīra erected a mighty wall after his name around the Hall of Dance for the Lord who had taken a vow to destroy the “enemy fortresses”. The flags fluttering on the summit of the wall, being scorched by the sun, cooled themselves by exposure to the water-laden clouds.

COMMENT 1: This wall is also called the Kulōttunga Cōlan tirumāligai, obviously after Naralōkavīra’s patron, Kulōttunga I (Chapter VI).

COMMENT 2: The “enemy fortresses” here mean the three *malas* (impurities), namely, *āṇava*, *māyīya* and *karma*. This concept appears to be common to many Śaivite cults including the *Pratyabhijnā* doctrine.

Verse 9

asyāyam sa cakāragōpurayugam
 cāmēgha tungasthitam
 prākārasya yadagra kētanapaṭāh
 prēnkōlitāvāyubhih
 bhānōsanuna vaidyamētaduritam
 tanumuca śankām kramā
 dāgachchēti diśāmmukhēṣvabhinayam
 samvartayamtīvatē

Translation: He built a pair of towers which reached the clouds. The flags flying on the wall were fluttering in the wind as if inviting the sun-scorched pilgrims coming from the four quarters to take shelter under them.

COMMENT: It is probable that the pair of towers referred to were the superstructures built over the eastern and western entrances cutting through the two innermost *prākāra* walls.

Verse 10

samnyām ityarulākaraḥ kavijanā
yasyāhurasyaṁ kṣitau
satyārtham satayākarōt śataśilā
stambhasthiram maṇṭapam
nṛttārḥā mamakēvalam paśupatiḥ
dabhrēti matvā sabhām
kaḷikēḷikayā samam vitanutē
tatrōtsava prēyasīm

Translation: (Naralōkavīra), whom the poets justifiably call *arulākara*, caused the constructions of a hundred-stone-pillared hall. Paśupati (Śiva), considering this *small* hall more befitting to his dance, sported himself with his beloved, Kālī.

COMMENT 1: The poet appears to have used the word *daharēti* to imply that the structure represented the *small* space within the heart (*daharākāśa*) of Naralōkavīra and that the Lord began to perform his *pancakṛtya* dance over there (Chapter VIII).

The hundred-pillared hall referred to is obviously the same as the one that is now in a highly dilapidated condition in the 3rd *prākāra* of the temple complex.

COMMENT 2: Kālī is looked upon in the *krama* system, which is an aspect of the *pratyabhijnā darśana*, as Śiva's component and hence the Supreme principle (*tattva*). She too performs the same *pancakṛtya* dance in an identical manner (Chapter VIII).

Verse 11

ānāgalōkam parikhānitāyāḥ
tatrātiśailaissa capuṣkarīṇyāḥ
cakāra sa tadyaśōgatasya
pātālamāsīt avarōhamasyām

Translation: He caused the deepening of the tank as if to reach the world of serpents (*nāga-lōka*) and built flight of stone steps through which his fame could descend to the nether-world.

COMMENT: The tank obviously refers to the existing *Śivaganga-tīrtha*.

Verse 12

dvārasya tatra valabhīmaya dakṣiṇasya
 samvartyakāncanamayīm naralōkavīrah
 tatpārśvayōh nyadita māṅgalikaupradīpau
 yau lumpatah prabhavasantamasam prājānam

Translation: Naralōkavīra set up auspicious lamps on both sides of the golden gateway, situated on the southern side (of the temple). The lights were capable of dispelling the darkness from the minds of the subjects.

COMMENT: In the foregoing pages it is inferred that the *cit-sabhā* always faced the southern direction thereby conforming to north-south axis, and that the structures added later on only emphasized this orientation of the temple complex. It is also inferred that the two innermost *prākāras* were open along the southern direction (Chapter VI). This verse adds another string of support to the view that the main gateway was situated on the southern side, the traces of which, however, are no longer in existence.

Verse 13

ayamiha ṛṣakētōh pūjakānām dvijānām
 akṛtaśucimanūnām bhaktihētōrvibhūtim
 itaradapi kumārastōtra pārāyaṇāya
 tribhuvananutamuchchaih kāncanam mantāpanca

Translation: The twice-born priests of the One (Śiva), whose symbol was the bull, were the recipients of many gifts from him (Naralōkavīra). His another gift was a golden hall for the recitation of the *kumāra stōtra*.

COMMENT 1: The epithet 'twice-born' (*dvija*) is used here to denote the priests who had been initiated, thereby indicating a second "birth".

COMMENT 2: T. N. Subrahmaniam has suggested that *kumāra stōtra* may possibly refer to the hymns of Tirugnānasambandar. We should like to point out that *kumāra* in this context means 'sport' and therefore it is to be understood in the *pratyabhijnā* context. The sport denotes the *pancakṛtyā* dance of Śiva. It is likely that the *stōtra* referred to may be the *kēli* compositions of Abhinavagupta which contain the philosophical import of the 'sport' of Śiva, that is, *pancakṛtya* and related esoteric thoughts.

Verse 14

satatra mahatīm sabhāmapi vidhāya tamrēṇatām
jagaddurita śātinah kila sabhānabhōdhūrjateh
sayambakastitātakṣamāgagatā nibhahvibhāgan
nijamnīnāya (sura) sundarī madhuragītibandhārtham

Translation: He covered the Great Hall with copper so as to make it befitting to dhūrjati (Śiva), who is the destroyer of the evils of the world and the dancer in the space. (The last two lines are defective).

COMMENT: The term *nabhā* here refers to the 'universe and beyond' of the *pratyabhijnā* context, implying that the Lord dances in the limitless expanse, that is, the Great Hall. Physically it is the *cit-sabhā* itself in view of its having attained greatness as the abode of such a Dancer. Statements like "cirrambalattē pērambalattānai", "ambalathul niraindādum oruvanē" and "ambalamum kōyilākak-konḍār tamē" occurring in the *tēvārams* convey the same import—that the *cit-ambaram* itself is the *pērambalam* and that the Lord has chosen the expanse for his abode (*kōyil*) (Chapter IV).

Verse 15

samārga cāran caturantayānam
śambhōssakāncana makarayadanvitaśrīh
bhikṣāṭanēṣu ṛṣabham vṛsarājakētu
yatrāsutat samadhi rōhatiyuktamētat

Translation: He caused the construction of a vehicle made of gold with a bull mounted on it for the One with the symbol of the bull (Śiva) for His being taken in *bhikṣāṭana** procession.

* In legend, *bhikṣāṭana* denotes an act of Śiva, when he went with a begging bowl amidst the sages in the Dārūka-forest.

Verse 16

nyadita kanaka kaup̄tam kāhaḷamtatra yasmin
 itikathayati nāḍēnāgatōdēvadēvah
 drutamukuḷita vāṇīsparśagun̄jatkirīṭō
 bhavatisurapatīnām sambhramō bhaktijanmā

Translation: He presented a bugle inlaid with gold for announcing the arrival of the god of gods (Śiva). (On hearing the call of the bugle) Indra raised both his hands in homage above his jewelled crown.

Verse 17

pratinavamiva puṣpam hāritaśrī sabhāyāh
 phalamavani carāṇāmdyō carāṇāncabhadram
 tadamṛtavidhiyōgyam kāncanam tatraśambhōh
 parikaramakṛtaśrīdyōtayanī yadastē

Translation: Fresh flowers, which are pleasing to the men of earth as well as to the gods of heaven, were arranged to be brought for offering to the Lord of the resplendant hall. He also gifted golden vessels for keeping the nectar-like food offerings to Śambhu.

Verse 18

ayamakuratatasminṛttarājasya śambhōh
 śivayajanarasagnō mauktikairbhūṣaṇāni
 vapuṣi parigatānām nirmalānām purārēh
 munijanahrdayānām yāni sāmyamvahanti

Translation: Naralōkavīra, who had imbibed the bliss resulting from the contemplation on Śiva, made for Śambhu, the King of Dancers and bestower of bliss, jewels which, in purity, resembled the hearts of the sages; the ornaments adorned the Destroyer of the Fortresses (Śiva).

COMMENT: There appears to be a suggestion here that *nirmalānām* refers to a state where the 'three impurities' are destroyed, that is, the state of *nirmalatva* (see Comment 2, verse 8). This imagery extends to the pure pearls, on the one hand, and to the hearts of the sages, on the other, who also have destroyed the 'three impurities'. Naralōkavīra, who is described as *śivayajanarasajna*, obviously belonged to such sage-like group. May the suggestion be carried further to imply that because of the destruction of the impurities,

the sages attain the Śiva-hood, that is, one-ness in Śiva, which is a *pratyabhijnā* concept?

Verse 19

kṣīram sakhandamamṛtam kurutēsmatasmin
gaurīpate diviśadōviṣamēvapāyāh
brūtaprajāh kimamarēṣu sabhānaṭēkim
bhaktiprapancasulabhō bhavatiprasādah

Translation: (Naralōkavīra) made arrangements for offering nectar-like milk with candy to Gaurīpati (Śiva) in contrast to the poison offered by the heavenly beings. O people, say, from whom can a man of devotion obtain grace—heavenly beings or the Dancer of the Hall?

COMMENT 1: The implication of the question is that a devotee can obtain grace only from Naṭarāja and not from other gods.

COMMENT 2: It should be emphasized that *prasāda* (= *anugraha*), according to the *pratyabhijnā darśana*, is one of the *panca-kṛtyas* of Śiva symbolized in *ānanda tāṇḍava*.

Verse 20

kārpūravarti kalanāsurabhīmēcadīpah
nityānadhattanikaṭṭe daśadhurjaṭṭēśah
.....pta kalagandhatayādharitī
dhattēparam subhagatām iti satyamētat

NOTE: 'vya' appears to be the lost part in line 3.

Translation: (Naralōkavīra) gifted ten lamps to be burnt with sweet smelling and fine camphor to the One with braided locks (Śiva). The smell of burning was the evidence of her (earth) fragrant fortune (?)

Verse 21

jāmbūnadam kalaśamatra vidhāyakāntam
aparancāhēmavihitān naralōkavīrah
dāsyam harasyapadayōh svamananyalabhyam
bhaktinca puṇya sulabhāmanayat prasiddham

Translation: Naralōkavīra gifted an evershining water-pot and other articles made of gold. They proclaimed that devotion and

service of the feet of Hara (Śiva) brought merit—which cannot be obtained in any other way—easily.

Verse 22

tatrābhiṣēkamamṛtanca vibhōssahasra
madiśat dvijakamādhēnuh
 puṇyastadītya kṛtyō jagatīva kīrti
 dugdantuhantibhavanē madandviṣāstāh

Translation: Naralōkavīra presented one thousand cows which yielded nectar-like milk for the conduct of the sacred bath (of the Lord). (This meritorious act is likened to the milk of fame emanating from Naralōkavīra, who is compared to the celestial cow, the *kamadhenu*?)

Verse 23

āpayāhprativasāram harapāda
 prātahpraṇāmārtinō
 vaikunthapramukhāsura api bahi
 tiṣṭhantiyasyāgnaya
 yasmin prītirupāhita bhagavata
 śambhōrananyāśrya
 nandīśasya sa tatramurtihmatulā
 dēvyāśca tasyākarōt

Translation: He (Naralōkavīra) caused the consecration of the image of the sacred bull and of the consort of the Lord. The bull, by his uninterrupted devotion to Śambhu, obtained His endearment to such an extent that the Lord of Vaikunṭha (Viṣṇu) and other gods who came there for worship had to seek his permission.

COMMENT: Māṇikkavācakar's oft-cited statement from Tirukko-viayar, as a proof for a Viṣṇu shrine having been in existence in the temple complex in the same locus as it stands today, is comparable with the allusion to Viṣṇu in this verse. Both these references should be taken strictly as poetic fancies and not as historical facts (Chapter V).

Verse 24

tadbhūṣaṇāni bahuratna vicitritāni
 kṛtvādayanidhirayam naralōkavīrah
 tasyārcanāvidhi vibhūtikaram karēṇa
 grāmamvihinamakarōd samānamēkam

Translation: Naralōkavīra gifted jewels set with several kinds of precious gems. He also donated a tax-free village to meet the expenses of the daily rituals.

Verse 25

pratiprastha sahasrēṇa
mūlasthana nivāsinām
atrābhiṣēktum pratyabda
mīśam prādātparamśriyam

Translation: He gave every year costly articles in thousand measures for conducting the sacred bath of the Lord dwelling in the 'primeval seat'.

COMMENT: The Samskr̥t equivalent employed in this verse is *mūlasthāna*. Although this term refers in general usage to a sancium sanctorum with a consecrated *linga* in the Śaivite context, it should be emphasized that the *mūlasthāna* here refers to the *cit-sabhā* itself, particularly in view of the fact that such a conventional type of *mūlasthāna* was not in existence in the Naṭarāja temple complex in the time of Kulōttunga I. The existing *mūlasthāna* shrine appears to have been constructed in the middle of the 13th century (Chapter IV).

Verse 26

yadvāni girijā kucapragalitam
pītvā pranṛttampayō
mādhuryādadhikāntatō vikalita
srīkanṭhakīrtikramā
mūrtim tasya dṛśānmahōtsavakarīm
kāntyākumārasyatām
kṛtvāyamca śātakumbhaghāṭitam
tasyādiśat pāyasam

NOTE: In the absence of correct text it is not possible to give a meaningful rendering of this verse; at the same time there is difficulty in accepting the rendering provided by Subrahmaniam. I vaguely suspect that the words *nṛttam*, *krama* and *kumāra* are technical expressions that are to be interpreted in the *pratyabhijnā* context.

Verse 27

bhaṭṭācārya itiśrutam bhuviśivā
mūrtim guhāyāmvasan
samvādam kila vēdabahasamaya
nāthasya cakrēpurā

tanmūrtim vinivēdā lōkaparamā
 nandapradām pāvanīm
 sōyam brahmakulōdvahōvihitavān
 tasminsatāmagraṇīh

Translation: The world-renowned Bhaṭṭācārya, who resided in the cave and who was the worshipper of the auspicious icon (of *ānanda tāṇḍava*), discoursed with the leaders of the extra-Vēdic cults. His image, which gave immense joy to the world, was installed by the one who was of the *brāhmaṇa* descent.

COMMENT: This verse conveys certain very important items of information about the monastic nature of the *cit-sabhā*. Although it is not possible to identify the *Bhaṭṭācārya* (teacher of doctrine) referred to, it appears to be certain that he was the head of the monastic order, particularly in view of the highly respectful terms with which he is introduced; he should have been an expert in his cult-lore to have discoursed with the leaders of non-Vēdic cults. That his image should have generated immense joy to the world is enough to mark him as a highly distinguished member of the Naṭarāja institution. His having lived in the *guha* (cave, secret chamber) clearly indicates that the *cit-sabhā* was used as a place of *yōgic* practices. Lastly, his discourses to the leaders of religious cults which were outside the Vēdic fold indicates that he was himself a leader of one such cult. That this cult was the *pratyabhijnā* school is inferred from the historical and cultural factors that have gone into the making of the Naṭarāja institution (Chapter XIII).

Verse 28

dēvyā (stasya) śśikhari duhituh kāmakoṣṭhasthitāyāh
 prākārajyāmapī dayōtamasaukaupavān maṇḍapanca
 kincaitasyāh svapati naṭanāsthāna yōgyaparakāram
 satyam bhaktyā sukaramakarōt bhūṣaṇam maulipūrvam

Translation: He caused the construction of compound walls and an open hall to the shrine of the goddess and adorned her icon with fine jewels from head to foot. The structure was befitting as a hall of dance for Her Lord.

COMMENT: The structures mentioned refer to the Pārvati shrine (*kāmakkōṭṭam*) in the 3rd *prākāra* enclosure.

Verse 29

pītāmbaram kāncanamēṣa dēvyā
 stat kāmakoṣṭhasthitimāsthītāyāh
 cakarāyadvairi vilāsinīnām
 vanāgni dhūmāmbaratām karōti

Translation: Naralōkavīra presented a golden cloth to the goddess consecrated in the shrine; the brilliance of the cloth pervaded the entire atmosphere in the same way as the flames of the forest fire (in which the wives of enemies perished ?)

Verse 30

kincāyamatraiva cakāra sālam
 bāhyam śilābhirnaralōkavīrah
 yāṣṛngamēghastananitai śivāyāh
 krīḍāmayūra racayantilāsyam

Translation: Naralōkavīra erected a high stone wall around the shrine of the goddess (Śivā), the height of which touched the clouds; the sporting peacocks displayed the *lāsyā* dance.

Verse 31

tatraivōrvīdharapatisutādhamnīdhāturm śīśūnā (m)
 tailakṣīraissadayamakarōt eṣanīyam vibhūtim
 ślāghyāsāhiprathamapadavī sānukampaśayānām
 pumśam lōka tritaya janani dāsyacinhantadēva

Translation: (Naralōkavīra) made endowments for the supply of oil and milk every day for children as a gesture of goodwill indicative of the grace of the mother who bore the three worlds. This act must be the first preference of those who give charities.

APPENDIX B

CHRONOLOGY

A.D.

800 – 850: Śivasūtras revealed to Vasūgūpta.

850 – 900: Kallata's commentary '*Madhuvāhinī*' on Śivastūra; and a few other works on *spanda*.

900 – 955: Migration of a group of followers of the *pratyabhijnā* doctrine from Kashmir and their settlement at Perumbarrappuliyūr.

907 – 955: Parāntaka I. Building of *tilla* (monastery), with gilded roof (hence, *pon-ambalam*).

1070–1120: Kulōttunga I. Guilding of the roof of *tilla*; commencement of the construction of the innermost *prākāra* wall, *kāmakōṭṭam*, 100-pillared hall.

1118–1135: Vikrama. Guilding of the roof of *tilla*; completion of the structural work commenced in the time of Kulōttunga I.

1133–1150: Kulōttunga II. Guilding of the roof of *tilla*; extension of the temple complex precincts and building activities continued; a *Viṣṇu* shrine, situated nearby, but obstructing the expansion project, probably demolished.

1178–1216: Kulōttunga III. Construction of the '*mukha maṇṭapa*' (*kanaka-sabhā*) in front of the *cit-sabhā*; establishment of the east-west entrances and passage between the *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā*; foundation of the eastern and western *gōpuras*; construction of *nṛtta-sabhā* (*ratha-maṇṭapa*), second *prākāra* wall, and the foundation of the 1000-pillared hall.

1243–1278: Kōpperunjinga. Construction of the *mūlasthāna* around A.D. 1240.

1510: Krishnadēvarāya (Vijayanagar) made endowments to Naṭarāja; also, perhaps, completed the northern *gōpura*.

1530: Acyutarāya (Vijayanagar) made endowments for conducting car festival of Chidambarēśvara (Naṭarāja).

1539: Consecration of the Gōvindarāja shrine by Acyutarāya in its present locus

- 1597: Krishnappa Nāyaka of Ginjee re-erected the Gōvindarāja shrine and made structural additions.
- 1644: Śrīrangarāya (Vijayanagar) repaired the *gōpura* and front *maṇṭapa* of the Gōvindarāja shrine; also the shrines of Puṇḍarīkavalli and Śūdikoḍutta nāchchiyār.
- 1749: Captain Cope took shelter in the Naṭarāja temple.
- 1750–1770: Break in the continuity of worship in the Naṭarāja temple.
- 1753–1760: French troops occupied the temple and converted it into a garrison.
- 1760: Temple occupied by the British troops.
- 1760–1780/1: Temple under the occupation of Hyder's troops intermittantly.
- 1754–1794: Pachaiyappa Mudaliyar. Extensive reconstruction and repair to the temple complex; repairs to the eastern *gōpura*; closing of the back chamber in the *tilla*.
- 1773: Re-installation of the icon of *ānanda tānaḍva* in the *cit-sabhā*; priests of the shrine call themselves *dīkṣitars* and become the absolute owners of the temple complex.
- 1781/2: Institution and celebration of the second brahmōtsava for Naṭarāja.

GLOSSARY

advaita: non-dualistic system of philosophy.

āgama: scriptural literature of certain non-Vēdic religions.

ākāśa: space, void.

ambalam, ambaram: open expanse, sky; derivatively, a temple.

ānanda: bliss.

ānanda tāṇḍava: Dance of Bliss.

arcana: worship, according to the prescribed modes, particularly as contained in the *āgamas*.

ardha mantapa: technical term in temple architecture front porch adjoining the sanctum sanctorum. The narrow east-west passage between *cit-sabhā* and *kanaka-sabhā* is an analogue of this structure at Chidambaram.

bali pītha: sacrificial seat of stone, always positioned between the Nandi (bull) and the flag-staff in front of the sanctum sanctorum.

caryā: a part of *āgama* dealing with temple service.

caturvēdimangalam: literally, the sacred four *Vēdas*. In usage, a village gifted to scholars of the four Vēdas, namely, Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva.

cit: consciousness.

cit-sabhā: Hall of Consciousness.

citrakūṭa: decorated hall.

daharōpāsana: 'meditation on the inner space', that is heart. In *yōgic* concept the heart represents the residence of the 'Self'.

darśan: literally, 'seeing'; implies the act of looking at and concentration on the deity in a temple.

darśana: literally, 'seeing'; technically, 'seeing the Truth', a philosophical doctrine.

dēva-dāna: 'gift in the name of God'; in the medieval times, cultivable lands were bequeathed to temples so that the income realized therefrom was used for the maintenance of the institution.

dēva-sabhā: 'Hall of God'. A closed enclosure in the Naṭarāja temple complex.

dīkṣa: initiation ceremony gone through by an individual so as to authorise him to conduct rituals or undergo certain discipline.

dīkṣita: a person who has undergone the initiation rites.

edirambalam: 'hall in front'; a structure in the Naṭarāja temple complex, which is no longer in existence.

garbhagrha: literally, 'House of Womb'; in usage, the sanctum sanctorum of a temple, the *mūlasthāna*.

gōpura: gateway of temple.

grhya sūtra: scripture outlining the domestic rituals.

jnāna: a part of *āgama* dealing with the knowledge of the Truth.

kāmakōṭṭam: the shrine of the Beloved of Śiva.

kanaka-sabhā: 'Golden Hall'. This term strictly refers to the *cit-sabhā* in the Naṭarāja temple complex, although in loose usage the front porch is also implied.

kaula: *tāntric* school; *kula* stands for Śiva in some schools and for *Śakti* in some others; a follower of the *kula* doctrines is a *kaula*.

kōṣṭha: a niche, a cubicle,

nṛtya mūrti: icon in dancing posture.

pāduka: footwear; Sandals of the Lord, or of a religious teacher, which are worshipped in temples as proxy.

pāmālai: 'Garland of Songs'.

pancakṛtya: Pentad Functions; the *pratyabhijnā* darśana ('Kashmir Śaivism') conceives that Lord Śiva manifests Himself through five functions, viz., Creation, Maintenance, Destruction, Concealment and Favour.

pancākṣara: 'Five Alphabets'; many Śaivite cults look upon the alphabets, *na-ma-*

śi-va-ya, as the most sacred and mystic symbols. The alphabets together mean 'Obeisance to Śiva'. For the *pratyabhijnists*, the alphabets themselves represent the body of Śiva.

pandāram: literally, a treasury; in the medieval parlance the term was applied to the personnel attached to the temple treasury; in course of time, any person having a share in the management of a temple or monastery was referred to by this term.

pērambalam: alternative name for cit-ambaram.

pītha: seat.

pon: literally, gold; in the medieval usage the term referred to gold coins also.

prākāra: enclosure, enclosure wall, generally surrounding the sanctum sanctorum.

prāyaścitta: purificatory ritual.

pūja: worship, private or public.

pūjaka: worshipping priest in a temple in the strict sense.

purāṇa: mythology.

rahasya: secret, secrecy.

rāja-sabhā: 'Hall of Kings'. A structure in the Naṭarāja temple complex, identified with the 1000-pillared hall.

ratha-manṭapa: 'Chariot Hall'; a structure built in the shape of a chariot drawn by horses or elephants. The *nṛtta-sabha* in the Naṭarāja temple complex.

sabhā: literally, assembly; applied to the 'halls' in the Naṭarāja temple complex.

sabhāpati: 'Lord of the Hall', that is, Naṭarāja.

sādhana: discipline.

śaiva siddhānta: doctrine of Śaivism; a school of Śaivite thought that held sway over Central India from the 9th century.

samādhi: a final state of *yōga* where the consciousness alone prevails.

samayācārya: 'teacher of doctrine'; in the Tamil country, the name is applied to the 'First Four' *nāyanmārs*.

samhāra nṛtya: 'Dance of Destruction'.

sandhi pūja: ritualistic worship conducted in the temples at specified intervals

sannidhi: literally, 'that which is near'; in general usage, a shrine.

srīvaiṣṇava: follower of the religion and philosophy of Rāmānuja.

sthalapurāṇa: mythological narrative of a sacred place.

sthalavṛkṣa: tree of the sacred place, that is, the temple.

sthāna: locus.

sthāvara: literally, 'that which stands'; in usage, refers to the consecrated *linga*.

stōtra: metrical compositions of the praises of the Lord.

sūtra: aphorism.

svāyambhu: self-created.

taniyūr: unitary town'; an independent administrative town.

tantra: literally, 'expansive knowledge'; a school which deals with mystic symbols and formulae.

tapasvin: person devoted to *tapas*, that is penance.

tēvāram: 'Garland for God'; metrical and musical composition in the Tamil language written by the first three *nāyanmārs*.

tirumuṟai: 'sacred mode'; an anthological series of twelve books in the Tamil language, containing Śaivite religious literature, largely devotional.

vacana: free-verse compositions in the Kannada language written by devotees of the Lingāyat cult.

vaidika: pertaining to Vēda; a follower of the Vēdic religion.

vēda: scriptural texts of the twice-born. See *grhya-sūtra*.

vimāna: the sanctum sanctorum inclusive of its superstructure.

yantra: a mystic diagram to which worship is offered.

yōga: the act of disciplining the mind through the control of senses.

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